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Published PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

Ellefsen, R & Busher, J 2020, 'The Dynamics of Restraint in the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty Campaign', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 165-179.

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2020/issue-6/ellefsen-and-busher.pdf>

ESSN 2334-3745

Publisher: University of Massachusetts Lowell

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The Dynamics of Restraint in the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty Campaign

by Rune Ellefsen and Joel Busher

Abstract

This article examines the functioning and failure of restraint throughout the Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign, from its start in 1999 to its end in 2014. SHAC provides an intriguing case for those interested in restraint within militant or radical social movements. The campaign comprised a range of lawful and unlawful activities. These often extended well beyond standard repertoires of nonviolent civil disobedience - surprising perhaps in a campaign that claimed to be rooted in a nonviolent tradition; but rarely resulted in interpersonal violence and never in the use of lethal force, even as the escalation of state-led repression and policing limited opportunities for peaceful protest. In this article we first identify three aspects of the campaign where a satisfactory explanation for the observable patterns of violence across the SHAC campaign appears to require an understanding of restraint: innovations away from more militant tactics at the outset and during the final stages of the campaign, and the maintenance of the outer limits of violence during the campaign peak. We then explain this restraint, and how it functions or fails. In doing so, we observe a difference between the processes of restraint described: while the innovations away from more militant tactics are to a large extent contingent on developments within the activists' operating environment, the restraint processes associated with maintaining the outer limits of the action repertoire are more deeply inscribed within the basic logics of the campaign. We reflect on the implications of these findings for future research and analysis of restraint within radical movements, and on methodological challenges encountered during this analysis. The article is based on documentary evidence and qualitative data, including interviews and the observation of trials involving SHAC activists.

Keywords: Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty; SHAC; animal liberation; restraint; internal brakes; political violence; limits of violence.

Introduction

The Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC) campaign is often held up as a high-water mark for militant animal rights activism.[1] SHAC was launched in Britain in 1999 with the aim of closing down Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), at the time the world's largest animal testing and experiment contractor. Throughout its lifespan, from 1999 to 2014, SHAC diffused to become a transnational grassroots campaign of above- and underground groups deploying lawful tactics, such as demonstrations, online protests and letter writing, and unlawful tactics, such as threats, property damage and arson attacks. During this time over 250 companies severed their links with HLS after being pressured by the campaign, and in 2001 SHAC almost succeeded in pushing HLS into bankruptcy.[2] The campaign prompted a major escalation of repression by assorted state actors, which eventually curtailed and then led to the demise of SHAC.[3]

SHAC provides an intriguing case for those interested in restraint within militant or radical movements and how these evolve, work and fail. On the one hand, it presents what could be seen as a spectacular failure of restraint. Despite claims to be embedded within a nonviolent tradition, throughout much of the campaign, conventional and transgressive protest tactics were combined with violent tactics and personalized intimidation against anyone involved with, or with business-links to HLS, such as shareholders, customers or service providers.[4] This included some activists who largely associated with the underground faction of the campaign setting fire to cars in people's driveways, throwing bricks through the windows of their houses, disseminating malicious rumors and threatening to harm people's children.[5]

Yet SHAC also provides an example of a persistent holding back, or retreating, from more serious forms of violence, even as new legislation and policing tactics limited opportunities to undertake conventional protest and direct action without incurring major legal sanction. Even during the periods of greatest confrontational intensity, activists never deployed lethal force and their use of interpersonal violence was very rare. When activists did commit violence against persons, it almost always resulted from an individual attempting to stop activists in the course of damaging property.[6]

In this article, we examine how restraint contributed to shape three aspects of the SHAC campaign: 1) innovation away from violence at the onset of the campaign; 2) a reorientation away from violence during the final stages of the campaign; and 3) the absence of further escalation of violence at the peak of the campaign. In doing so we make three contributions. First, with regards to the SHAC campaign itself, we provide a fuller explanation for the patterns of, and limits on, violence across the lifecycle of the British campaign than has been offered by the existing literature that has, to date, focused largely on how repression and policing shaped the nature and outcomes of the campaign.[7] Second, we contribute to efforts to better understand processes of restraint, or the ‘internal brakes on violent escalation’,[8] within radical milieus more broadly by developing the idea that, even within the same campaign, processes of restraint can be understood as being on a continuum between being more contingent upon changes within the activists’ operating environment to being more deeply inscribed within the underlying logics of the campaign or wider movement. Third, we discuss methodological challenges raised by our analysis.

The article is based on a combination of documentary evidence, including movement publications, memoirs, government reports, court documents and news reports, and qualitative data gathered primarily by semi-structured interviews in England throughout 2013 and 2014. These comprise twenty interviews with activists involved in organizing the campaign, most of whom had spent time in prison for their activism, and additional interviews with one HLS director, two representatives from the police, one representative from SHAC’s counter-movement (the ‘Pro-test’ organization), and one of SHAC’s defense solicitors. Our data also includes notes from seven weeks of observation in two criminal trials against SHAC defendants in the same period.[9]

Documents and news reports were used to make a timeline of SHAC’s lifecycle and trace how tactics of protest and repression evolved, with movement publications also used to explore intra-movement discussions about strategy and the use of violence. Interviews were oriented towards the interaction between the activists, their targets and agents of repression, and thematically focused on the campaign’s modus operandi, the counter-responses of the British government and law enforcement, and how their interaction impacted the campaign’s development. A potential limitation of the data is that we did not explicitly ask about restraint during our interviews. However, the thematic scope of the interviews, with their focus on strategic and tactical decision-making, provided data suitable for examining this issue. Observation notes from the trials are not quoted in the article, but provided insights about the evolution of the campaign not offered by the other data, and contributed to the triangulation of different sources of data about the same events, thereby assisting validation. The article also builds on existing published research that lays out in detail the evolving relationship between the campaign and key adversaries.[10]

SHAC: An Overview of a Multi-dimensional Animal Liberation Campaign

Since at least the 1970s, Britain has had an internationally high-profile animal rights movement sector.[11] A small faction of this movement sector supports and employs illegal and sometimes violent tactics: what we refer to as the Animal Liberation Movement (ALM). The ALM encompasses an aboveground faction comprising groups that mobilize openly and carry out both lawful and unlawful actions, and an underground faction comprising groups that exclusively deploy unlawful strategies of action. Among the groups that comprise the underground faction are the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), internationally the best-known militant animal liberation group,[12] and smaller, more violent groups such as the Animal Rights Militia. There has consistently

been important tactical heterogeneity within the ALM.[13] During the 1980s and 1990s, however, the most militant activists sent letter bombs, deployed incendiary and explosive devices, sent letters with razor blades, and conducted both hoax and real product contamination campaigns.[14]

The roots of the SHAC campaign lie in one of the major tactical innovations that emerged out of the ALM during the 1990s. This consisted of a shift towards targeted campaigns focused on closing down specific companies, usually those involved in animal experimentation. These campaigns combined above- and underground groups and lawful and unlawful actions. They generated a number of significant victories for the movement, with activists succeeding in closing down establishments such as Sky Commercial Rabbit Farm (1990), Hylyne Rabbits (1994), Consort Beagle Kennels (1997), Oxford University Park Farm (1999) and Hillgrove Cat Farm (1999).[15] Success bred repetition and tactical diffusion,[16] and after the closure of Hillgrove Cat Farm in 1999, a small group of prominent activists set their sights on HLS: by far the largest target to date by several degrees of magnitude. They founded the SHAC UK organization and launched the SHAC campaign.

As with the previous targeted campaigns, the SHAC campaign attracted a plethora of groups that deployed a mixture of conventional protest, civil disobedience and unlawful tactics. This combination brought early successes[17] but also triggered the multi-level government responses that led to its eventual collapse.[18] The 'SHAC campaign' is therefore an umbrella term we use to cover all protest activity against HLS. Even though for analytical purposes we distinguish between its above- and underground factions, it should be noted that many activists involved in the aboveground groups were openly supportive of underground groups involved in the campaign, such as the ALF.

The aboveground faction centred on the SHAC UK organization, led by established animal rights protesters Greg and Natasha Avery (née Taylor), and Heather Nicholson. It also encompassed various grassroots organizations and local groups across the country, many of which existed prior to SHAC and had previously engaged in other campaigns against animal experimentation and fur farming. While many of the tactics deployed by activists involved in this faction were legal, some of their actions, such as targeted and intimidatory protests outside the houses of individuals associated with HLS, still stood out as distinctly radical when compared with the tactics typically used by activists across the wider animal rights movement sector.[19]

The underground faction was organized through loose-knit cell structures, many of which identified with the ALF. Within this faction, activists used clandestine and unlawful tactics, such as property damage or destruction, with the intention of inflicting economic damage, exerting psychological pressure and issuing threats. They claimed, however, to adhere to the ALF guidelines that require that activists take 'all necessary precautions against harming any animal, human or nonhuman.'[20]

The two factions played distinct but interdependent roles in the campaign. The specific nature of the relationship between the two factions is, however, difficult to specify. What is clear is that SHAC UK was central to the overall campaign, undertaking most of the research about HLS and the selection of targets. They also disseminated the information required for individuals or groups, associated either with the above- or underground faction, to undertake their activities, thereby ensuring at least partial coordination of the campaign. From there, however, above- and underground groups pursued their own actions. In the criminal trials against persons involved in SHAC UK, it became evident that some had taken part in actions associated both with above- and underground factions.

In order to give some sense of the extent of activity by each faction, we know that between 2000 and 2002, there were about 850 lawful overt demonstrations outside the two main HLS-owned sites in Britain, ranging from 4 to 1000 protestors.[21] For 2006, police statistics reported around 1200 animal research incidents (lawful and unlawful actions) in the UK, of which a majority was related to SHAC, and a quarter of which were criminal actions conducted primarily by underground groups.[22] In 2009, SHAC UK claimed to administer a mailing list of 10,000 members to which they regularly disseminated details on new targets and campaign news.[23]

For the purpose of this article, we conceive of the SHAC campaign as consisting of three phases. *Phase 1, 1999 - 2001*, comprises the *launch and initial expansion of the campaign*. This phase is characterized by quite astonishing success. As described above, from the outset the campaign combined conventional protest with civil disobedience and unlawful tactics, and during the first three years, SHAC had a significant impact on HLS. By pressuring its shareholders to sell their shares and HLS' core business partners to cut ties with the company, activists were effective in disrupting HLS's ability to operate and caused them major financial difficulties. By early 2001, HLS was on the brink of collapse.[24] It was, however, saved, first in January, when it was backed by a US investment firm, and subsequently in July when, reportedly just hours away from bankruptcy, a series of regulatory initiatives by the UK government enabled the Bank of England to step in and rescue the company.[25]

This provides an important point of inflection in the campaign. While the campaign continued to expand, never again would activists get close to achieving their goal of closing down HLS. Furthermore, from 2001 there was a shift towards the escalation of violence, particularly from the underground faction. In February 2001, Brian Cass, the CEO of HLS, was attacked outside his home and hit over the head with a pick-axe handle,[26] and Andrew Gay, HLS Marketing Director, was also assaulted on his doorstep.[27] These attacks were condemned by SHAC UK spokesperson, Natasha Taylor, and would eventually turn out to be significant outliers. At the time, however, they appeared to indicate an increased appetite for violence, particularly when some prominent ALM figures, including Ronnie Lee, founder of the ALF, either did not condemn[28] or seemingly condoned the assaults.[29] The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) reported seven attacks that resulted in 'slight injury' in 2001,[30] including 60 incidents of property damage and 135 so-called 'home visits': actions at the private homes of persons linked to HLS.[31] Around this time reports emerged of incidents in which hundreds of letters were sent to the neighbours of people with links to HLS spreading malicious rumours, including allegations that they were paedophiles.[32] It was also at this point that SHAC UK broadened its targeting strategy. Rather than focusing mainly on HLS, its premises and employees, SHAC UK now increased its emphasis on secondary and tertiary targets, meaning that activists shifted attention towards HLS's business partners, customers, service providers, and even the service providers and customers of HLS-partners.

Phase 2, 2002 - 2007, comprises the *peak of the campaign* in terms of scope and participation, including significant internationalization as activists sought to recover the initiative. Within this period we can observe the development of an 'interactive' process of escalation involving activists and the state.[33] On the one hand, there was a significant extension of the powers of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors,[34] and a major expansion of law enforcement and intelligence capabilities as government and law enforcement actors, under significant industry pressure, sought to respond to what they identified as a 'crisis'[35] situation that posed an 'enormous' threat to the UK economy.[36]

On the other hand, some elements of the SHAC campaign and wider ALM deployed increasingly militant tactics. While not part of the SHAC campaign, 2004 saw an underground ALM group use grave-desecration as a pressure tactic: activists removed the buried remains of the mother-in-law of one of the owners of a farm that bred guinea pigs for experiments, and stated they would not return the remains until the farm ended that practice. In a sense the tactic was successful: the farm owners eventually conceded to these demands. It also attracted widespread media attention and condemnation from the general public, however, which spilled over onto the wider ALM and the SHAC campaign. The tactic was not repeated.

Some activists also adopted more violent tactics. ABPI reported that in the first three months of 2004, 32 company directors received 'threatening home visits', compared with 10 in the whole of 2003, and that instances of property damage doubled from one year to the next.[37] In 2006, Matthew Worrall, an ABPI spokesperson, stated, 'We've seen a few examples of car bombs and crude incendiary devices recently. There seems to be a move towards outright terrorism'.[38] Between 2005 to 2007, ABPI figures indicate there were 9 incidents in which activists deployed incendiary devices in the UK.[39]

This phase ended on 1 May 2007 when international police cooperation culminated in an operation in which 700 police officers raided thirty-two addresses in the UK, Netherlands and Belgium, resulting in the arrests of the SHAC UK founders along with 27 others.[40] Fifteen of those arrested were charged with conspiracy to blackmail, an offence carrying a maximum custodial sentence of 14 years.

The *third phase, 2008 - 2014*, marks the *decline of the campaign*. After the 2007 arrests, the SHAC campaign continued to operate in Britain and internationally.[41] As Lisa, a former SHAC organizer and prisoner, recalls, 'after the first trial there were still enough people left to carry it on. In 2008 I think there was something like 800 demos worldwide, which is pretty good. It seemed to be going really well.'

Nonetheless, the effects of repression were beginning to show. Police statistics indicate a steady decline in the number of unlawful and lawful protests by ALM activists in Britain between 2006 and 2010,[42] and further convictions and heavy sentences in 2010 placed additional strain on the campaign. It became increasingly evident to some activists that at least within the UK the SHAC campaign was, as Lisa puts it, beginning to 'wither away.'

In response to this apparent decline, some activists 'felt like the campaign should go totally underground' (Joan, former SHAC organizer and prisoner). Such a strategic re-orientation did not materialize, however. There were also indications of tactical escalation internationally. In late 2007 and early 2008, the Animal Rights Militia claimed responsibility for several product contaminations against SHAC targets in the UK and other European countries, marking the first contaminations by ALM activists since before the launch of the SHAC campaign.[43] Then, in 2009, there was a substantial increase in serious criminal actions against SHAC targets in mainland Europe, including the use of improvised explosive and incendiary devices.[44] After an arson attack in Germany, the Militant Forces Against Huntingdon Life Sciences released a communiqué, claiming responsibility and stating: 'It has come to a point where we must take any necessary action to make the murderers stop. And if necessary we are prepared to do physical harm.'^[45] Further expansion or escalation of violence did not take place, however.

In 2012, raids on a number of British activists by armed SO15 anti-terrorism teams, and subsequent prosecutions for minor incidents and accusations of petty crime (e.g. spray painting slogans) signalled the police's determination to dismantle the last remnants of the SHAC campaign in Britain.[46] SHAC publicly announced its end in September 2014 saying:

With the onslaught of government repression against animal rights activists in the UK, it's time to reassess our methods, obstacles and opponent's weaknesses, to build up our solidarity network for activists and to start healing the affects [sic] of repression.[47]

Beyond Repression: Recognizing the Role of Restraint within the SHAC Campaign

The first and very basic argument that we make is that if we want to provide a full and satisfactory explanation for the observable patterns of violence across the SHAC campaign, then restraint is an important part of the story.

As identified in the introduction, what makes the SHAC campaign an interesting case to study is that while it arguably comprises a high-water mark for militant animal rights activism, there were important limits to the escalation that took place. Much of the existing research on the SHAC campaign has emphasized the role of repression and policing in shaping the evolution of the SHAC campaign. In particular, it has highlighted that such escalated repression and policing, that began to appear in 2001 and accelerated after 2004, contributed to bring about the eventual decline in both unlawful and lawful activism from 2006 onwards.[48] There are,

however, a number of aspects of the campaign that are not well explained by the effects of repression, and certainly not by the effects of repression alone.

First, at the outset of the campaign, far from representing an escalation towards more militant strategies of action, the launch of SHAC represented an innovation away from more violent tactics. Interviewed just before SHAC's collapse in 2014, Rebecka, a former SHAC organizer and prisoner, reflected back on the early days of the campaign and how the tactics they used at that time differed from what later emerged:

What I think just looking back, in the early days there was a lot more sort of civil disobedience-type of actions, a lot more. You know, a lot more lock-ons and run-ins and things like that. [...] For example, in the early days there were a lot of protest camps outside the homes of directors, you know, customers or individuals with shares in Huntingdon. And you know, really like peaceful camps, with like campaigns in their gardens or [mild laughter], with banners and, you know. A lot of peaceful, non-violent direct action.

While these 'camps' were undoubtedly intimidating for those who were targeted, this nonetheless marked a de-escalation from the 1980s and 1990s when, as described above, some ALM activists had sent letter bombs, planted explosive and incendiary devices and carried out hoax and actual contamination campaigns. Furthermore, while this innovation was mainly initiated by the aboveground faction of the campaign, and particularly SHAC UK, it also led to a temporary tactical de-radicalization of the underground faction of the ALM as those activists sought to contribute to the broader campaign.

Second, based on the existing literature on patterns of escalation across protest cycles, we might have expected to see tactical escalation taking place in Phase 3 of the campaign, particularly within splinter groups that might have become disillusioned with the apparent failings of the core of the movement.[49] In the case of SHAC, however, while there was some escalation towards violence during Phase 3, particularly on mainland Europe, the decline of the movement did not give rise to the emergence of significant new tactical radicalization, particularly in Britain. Even within the most radical parts of the aboveground faction, activists resisted the temptation to go 'totally underground'. What emerged instead was a shift towards an alternate 'strategy of action',[50] centred on engaging in public debate, seeking public support and mobilizing a broader constituency. Activists have, for example, focused greater attention on industrial breeding of livestock for meat and dairy production, and the promotion of veganism. Where activists have engaged in direct action, they have adopted less militant tactics, such as undertaking 'open rescues' in which activists from new international ALM groups such as Direct Action Everywhere or Anonymous for the Voiceless employ confrontational tactics and breaches of the law, but with a stronger emphasis on being 'open' (not hiding their identity) and strictly observing the principles of non-violence.[51] While it is true that effective repression and even simply fatigue are likely to have contributed to some or even many activists choosing to step back from more militant aspects of the campaign, this alone would not explain why we do not see tactical escalation at the margins of the movement.

Third, even as interactive escalation between activists and the state fueled tactical radicalization during Phase 2 of the campaign, instances of physical interpersonal violence remained few and far between and activists never deployed lethal force. Indeed, even other provocative tactics that did not entail physical violence but were considered beyond the pale, such as grave desecration, were not repeated, despite the fact they enabled activists to achieve their immediate goals. Again, while state-led repression and policing might have inhibited or raised the costs of the use of violence, it does not on its own provide us with a satisfactory explanation as to why some activists at least did not escalate further. In fact, and as we might expect based on the literature on protest and repression,[52] while the escalation of repression and policing undoubtedly discouraged aboveground activism and gradually undermined support for the campaign, it also actually encouraged tactical escalation among some activists within the underground faction.[53] As Rebecka describes: 'I do really think that the more it [the aboveground faction] was clamped down on the more direct actions [from the underground faction] happened – and also they became more serious.'

Explaining Restraint within the SHAC Campaign

So how then did this restraint emerge, on what logics did it operate, and how and why did it have the effects that it did on SHAC activists?

The Initial Innovation away from Violence during Phase 1 of the Campaign

As described above, while the initial innovation away from more violent tactics came largely from the aboveground faction of the SHAC campaign, it also produced a temporary tactical de-radicalization of the underground faction. The interview data indicate that this was closely related to the sense of possibility and momentum that characterized the first years of the SHAC campaign, and the way in which the SHAC campaign drew in and integrated groups from the underground faction within a wider movement with clear strategic objectives.

The ALM's strategy of targeted campaigns, which evolved and expanded with the SHAC campaign, galvanized most of the ALM, including actors in the underground faction, towards a joint effort to coerce HLS into closure. Among underground actors in particular, their integration into a campaign that combined lawful and unlawful actions foregrounded strategic logics in a way that had often not been the case previously. Mark, a long-term ALM activist and former ALF prisoner, reflected for example:

I think prior to that [the SHAC campaign], there hadn't really been that type of focus against targets within the movement. I know for instance, when I was involved with the A.L.F., we didn't really do anything like that, we just used to go all over the place, taking actions against targets that were associated with animal abuse. And we didn't really think in terms of let's concentrate on a particular place, and so that we knocked that place out. [...] So the idea of having this concerted type of concentration on one place at a time was a new one, and it really was clever tactics, because of course, that resulted in places actually closing down. And that type of activity was very successful.

The initial successes described above fueled a sense of optimism, which in turn encouraged a view among activists across the campaign that further escalation was unnecessary. Social movement scholars observe that while tactical innovation might ostensibly be about attempting to out-manoeuvre one's opponents, what successful innovations also provide is a way of offsetting activists' sense of 'powerlessness' and providing them with hope.[54] At the outset of the SHAC campaign activists believed that they had found 'a successful way forward'.[55] As Joan recalls: 'Things were really on a roll. [...] The movement at that time was really empowered and motivated to the point of thinking; yeah, we're gonna get them.' Similarly, Emily remembers 'a real feeling of people thinking for the first time that the movement can win.' The 'successful way forward' that SHAC activists identified did entail significant disruption, some activists undertook campaigns of intimidation, and the fear generated by unlawful actions targeting HLS was understood to comprise an important part of the campaign. The more severe violence that had previously been deployed by some at the most militant underground fringes of the ALM seemed, however, neither necessary nor productive, in part, perhaps somewhat ironically, due to the way the news media reported, and arguably amplified,[56] the threats posed by the SHAC campaign. Dave, a former SHAC activist and ALF prisoner, recalls for example how even small incidents of unlawful disruptive action could trigger surprising results:

I remember we went to a company in London, and there were about 10 of us there. They had some champagne reception for investors. And he [one of the activists] managed to get in the building, and he kicked over this table with champagne on it. And then the police kicked him out. He didn't even get arrested. And I remember the next day, reading about the demo, in the *Financial Times*, and there was all these statements from witnesses, how terrified they were, how we'd run through the lobby, attacking people, hitting them, screaming. And this company then pulled out, you know, they pulled out of Huntingdon. And I was like: Oh my god! There were 10 of us. So you could go outside of some of the most powerful companies in the world, shout for 2 hours, and then the next day, in the *Financial Times*, you could read, yeah, there's another company that's gone. So it all appeared to

be going brilliantly.

This innovation away from more militant tactics began to give way in 2001 to a renewed militancy. The initial optimism gradually eroded, and as a response to the growing repression that gathered momentum in 2001 with, for example, the imprisonment for six months of the three founders and core organizers of the SHAC campaign in November 2001.[57] As Dave observes, ‘Obviously, there’s the point of view that look, if we can’t go and shout “Evil!” outside the laboratory, we get arrested for that, then we may as well resort to more militant actions.’

The Reorientation Away from Violence at the End of the Campaign

As with the innovation away from violence at the beginning of the SHAC campaign, our interview data indicate that the reorientation away from violence at the end of the campaign is also intimately related to the context in which activists found themselves at the time, albeit the mood of activists at this point could hardly have been more different. The ALM had been active in Britain since at least the mid-1970s, and within recent memory activists had been on the brink of closing down the world’s largest contract animal testing company. By the end of the SHAC campaign, however, it was clear to most activists not only that they had failed in their attempt to close HLS, but that the ALM itself was collapsing, or at the very least was at something of a crossroads. As Dave described at the time:

Maybe that purpose that we’ve held in the past, the loud shouting, screaming, someone take notice of us, maybe that won’t return, I don’t know. But it doesn’t look anywhere near like returning at the minute. So the peaks and troughs have always come, the high turnover has always been there. But it’s scary now, the amount of people that is gone. To me, it’s like we’re on a life support machine, maybe we’ve even gone into a coma. It’s that bad.

As described above, the question for us here is why activists at this crossroads chose to reorient away from violence rather than turning towards clandestinity and greater militancy. Certainly, effective and persistent repression is likely to be part of the answer, as is fatigue. Repression had resulted in all parts of the movement being permeated by apprehension about the costs of activism. Joan, like several other interviewees, argues that, whatever some ALM activists might claim, for many activists the shift to a more ‘liberal direction’ of activism was largely stimulated by a ‘massive blatant fear’ combined with a desire ‘to do something that feels good [but] that does not put them at risk, that doesn’t lose their privilege’.

The interview and documentary data indicate, however, that what also contributed to this reorientation away from more militant tactics was the way activists’ acknowledgment of failure prompted broader critical self-reflection. A growing consensus began to emerge across the campaign that in order to obtain meaningful social change, it was necessary to place more emphasis on building public support. As Vicky sums up in an interview undertaken just after the SHAC campaign ended:

People do feel like they reached a wall with campaigning and they’re trying to go around it. And they are kind of thinking; oh, we have to be nicer and quieter.

Paul makes a similar observation:

Because the wind has changed, repression changed, companies are changed, police are changed, public opinion changed, you now need the public opinion behind you if you want to achieve something.

Most of our activist interviewees were involved in the aboveground faction. As such, it is difficult for us to assess the extent to which activists within the underground shared this assessment. Nonetheless, the reorientation away from more militant tactics that flowed from this process of critical self-reflection affected activists across the above- and underground factions as a result of the interdependency of the factions: without the clear direction provided by the aboveground groups, the underground groups had no realistic chance of achieving the goal of closing down HLS.

Other movement-wide developments also influenced this period of critical self-reflection and subsequent tactical reorientation. By the latter stages of the campaign SHAC had become isolated and was facing heavy criticism from the wider (non-violent) animal rights movement.[58] This coincided with the growing movement-wide influence of a new generation of activists, without a prior history of engagement in the ALM, more oriented towards public awareness raising on issues such as commercial livestock farming and the promotion of veganism, and whose broader cultural reference points were located more within other non-violent campaigns than within the previously influential underground ALM militant scene.

This reorientation towards the use of less militant tactics therefore provides a potentially illuminating example of how external constraints and intra-group processes of restraint can intersect. Just as radical or militant social movements might rapidly escalate their use of violence and then adjust their aims and justifications,[59] the reverse might also happen: a move away from violence, triggered in this case to a significant extent by processes of repression, can be carried forward and consolidated as this also fosters a re-evaluation of activists' aims and objectives and a critical reflection on their choice of tactics.

The Absence of Further Escalation at the Peak of the Campaign

Explaining what held activists back from further escalation of tactics at the peak of the campaign is in a sense the most challenging of these three explanatory tasks, since there is less discussion of this within our interview data. This, we argue, is because this restraint is sufficiently deeply rooted within the underlying logics of the campaign that it is largely taken for granted by activists, a point we return to in the conclusion.

We propose, however, that an explanation can be developed, and that this can be done by a combination of tracing how such restraint proceeds from the underlying strategy of action,[60] and observing the reactions of activists at points where other activists either exceeded, or gave the impression that they might exceed, the broadly accepted outer limits of their action repertoire. In doing so, we identify 'brakes' that work both on 'strategic' and 'moral' logics.[61]

The target and aims of the campaign, and the fact that the campaign was always conceived of as combining above- and underground factions, appear to be of particular importance. The strategies and tactics of movements or campaigns are always developed in relation to their specific aims and objectives, and as a function of who activists identify as their main targets and how they believe they can influence those targets. The aim of the SHAC campaign was to close down HLS by undermining its financial viability and that of other related commercial enterprises.[62] Early in the campaign interpersonal violence was not perceived as necessary to achieve that aim, in part because other forms of low-level violence, such as property damage, threats and intimidation had already proved to be sufficient to achieve notable campaign successes. As described above, this confidence in their campaign strategy began to ebb away. Nonetheless, the activists in both the above- and underground factions continued to conceive of the campaign as combining both factions. Overall campaign success was understood to depend on an effective aboveground campaign just as much as it depended on an effective underground campaign, and it was broadly recognized by the activists that further escalation of violence would undermine the aboveground campaign by damaging public sympathy and support, and by encouraging further repression. It is notable that when escalation of violence did occur, as for example in the attack on Brian Cass, these actions were denounced by the SHAC UK leadership and others within the aboveground faction.

This logic extended beyond interpersonal violence to other tactics that were seen to alienate public support for SHAC and the wider movement: and probably helps to explain why tactics such as grave desecration were not repeated even though these had helped activists to achieve their immediate objectives.[63] As Paul reflected:

The grave digging was bad. I don't think the British media complained too much about aggressive campaigns. But, once you start to dig out a grave and send stupid letters about your neighbours having sex with children or sending the tampons with blood. You know you lost, you completely lost

... I think that is the day when the big change came.

Similarly, Dave, an ALM pioneer and former ALF prisoner, observes:

When I found out about the grave digging, and that they'd done it to a mother-in-law, not even a direct member of the family. I wasn't happy at all about it. Still to this day, people will come up to you, and they'll say: 'that grave digging was disgusting'. On one level, it was a master stroke. If you're looking at the short term, it's like a mafia style technique. It's like we're the mafia, if they want to attack you, they attack the family, yeah? As far as tactics go, it's a master stroke. It's like a chess game, you know. And it's like fucking checkmate, have this you bastards. But in the wider term, in the long-term ... I mean, things like that did public relations disaster.

And in contrast to other militant movements, such as parts of the extreme right or the international jihadi movement, no faction either of SHAC or the ALM ever sought to advance their cause by intentionally provoking repression or sparking violent conflict.

We also find evidence, particularly within the documentary material, of 'moral brakes'[64] on the deployment of interpersonal violence; perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the tactical tastes and choices made by social movement activists always to some extent reflect their political identities and moral visions.[65] In the case of the SHAC campaign, this centred on the value placed on non-violence, and the commitment expressed by activists across both above- and underground factions to reducing harm to animals, be they human or non-human.[66] The effects that this had on activists' tactical choices varied across the above- and underground factions, partly as a function of how broadly or narrowly they interpreted concepts such as harm and violence. For some of the underground groups, for example, their definition of non-violence is limited to condemning damage to the bodies of living beings, meaning that intimidation, property destruction and even arson might still be deemed non-violent and therefore acceptable.[67] Other activists even developed arguments in support of, or at least justifications for, the deployment of interpersonal violence.[68] However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which such arguments represent actual intent or a form of posturing or strategic bluff and bluster, intended to increase the effectiveness of threats and harassment, or simply to achieve personal fame and notoriety. For our purposes, however, what matters is that such pronouncements have repeatedly been met with criticism from much of the rest of the movement, both on strategic and moral grounds,[69] or treated at most as a provocation, rather than as a call to action.

By contrast to the innovations away from violence discussed above, the processes of restraint we have described here then are not so much a product of particular junctures of the campaign and their attendant conditions, but rather are deeply inscribed within the basic strategic and moral logics of the campaign and the broader ALM. Of course, it is possible to imagine situations in which these processes of restraint might have failed, and far greater interpersonal violence might have ensued, but had this happened, it seems that it would have entailed a substantial re-focusing or re-imagining of the whole campaign.

Conclusion and Reflections

The SHAC campaign involved arson attacks, property damage, threats and intimidation. Interpersonal violence was, however, 'very rare'[70], despite the fact that activists often had opportunities for such violence, and lethal force was never deployed. In this article, we have argued that while repression and policing strategies played an important role in shaping the evolution of the SHAC campaign, including its demise, we can generate a fuller, more nuanced and compelling account of the observable patterns of violence across the campaign if we also explore how activists themselves contributed to manage the parameters of their tactical repertoire. We have demonstrated this by tracing how processes of restraint shaped three aspects of the campaign that are difficult to satisfactorily explain with reference to the effects of repression alone: an initial innovation away from more violent tactics at the onset of the campaign; a reorientation away from clandestinity and the use of more violent

tactics at the end of the campaign; and the absence of greater escalation at the peak of the campaign.

The analysis we have presented draws attention to two slightly different types of restraint. The first consists of pivots away from more militant tactics, such as the innovations away from the use of violence observed at the onset and the end of the campaign. The second consists of how activists constructed and maintained the absolute outer limits of their action repertoire, by which we do not mean that it is inconceivable that individuals involved with the campaign would go beyond these limits, but that if they did, it is extremely difficult to conceive that the campaign would not have become something quite radically different as a result.

What stands out when we compare the dynamics of these different types of restraint is how they vary in terms of the extent to which they are rooted within the core logics of the campaign. While the innovations away from violence at the outset and end of the campaign were both informed by the campaign's basic strategy of action, they were also clearly products of activists' adaptation to changes within their operating environment and of specific junctures within their campaign or movement cycles. As a result, the extent to which such restraint worked or failed, persisted or weakened, was contingent to a significant degree on the actions of external parties. By contrast, the construction and maintenance of the absolute outer limits of their action repertoire appears to have been less contingent on external developments and more deeply inscribed into the fundamental logics of the campaign and the wider movement.

In practice of course we would expect these types of restraint to intersect and overlap. Nonetheless, being attentive to the fact that there might be two slightly different types of restraint in play appears to be useful in two ways. First, it helps to highlight and emphasize that the 'internality' and 'externality' of restraint is not binary, but rather a matter of degrees,^[71] with some processes of restraint emerging more out of a hybrid process of internal decision-making and adaptation to the changing operating environment, and other processes more deeply rooted within the core strategic and moral logics of the campaign or movement.

Second, it helps to draw our attention to the important point that if some forms of restraint weaken or fail, this does not necessarily mean that all forms of restraint will fail. In our case study, for example, even as the more contingent processes of restraint began to weaken or fail during the latter part of Phase 1 of the campaign, as they were effectively short-circuited by a mixture of frustrated ambition and escalated repression, the processes of restraint pertaining to the outer limits of escalation that were more deeply inscribed within the basic logics of the campaign continued to function. We believe that drawing out distinctions between processes of restraint that are more or less deeply rooted within the internal logics of a campaign or movement might substantially advance our theoretical and practical understanding of the dynamics of restraint by, for example, helping to locate key escalation thresholds, and to distinguish between escalation processes – or 'brake failure' – that are more or less likely to result in such thresholds being breached.

We believe it is useful and appropriate, however, to conclude by drawing attention to, and reflecting on, challenges that we encountered as we undertook this analysis, and that other scholars, analysts or policy practitioners are also likely to encounter. One of the most significant of these relates to the relative (in) visibility of some of these 'brakes' on escalation, and how to interpret their apparent presence or absence. This is particularly the case for some of the brakes that are most deeply embedded within the strategic and moral logics of the campaign or groups in question, precisely because being deeply embedded means they are largely taken for granted by activists and therefore not necessarily made explicit. SHAC activists did not remind or explain to one another with great frequency why they should not assault, let alone kill, those associated with HLS, because this was taken as a given. One pertinent methodological question might therefore be how such embedded understandings become established and are transmitted within milieus, and therefore how they might be observed.

Another challenge relates to how we conceptualized escalation and de-escalation. Within one temporal phase of the case study, we identified a reduction in the frequency of the most severe violence (e.g. the sending of

mail bombs), but a simultaneous increase in the frequency and spread of low-level violence (e.g. property destruction at private homes). We conceived of this as a de-escalation of violence. There is a certain ambiguity here, however, because the increased number of incidents of low-level violence seemingly had a greater cumulative effect on the activists' targets. This raises what seems to us to be an important conceptual question: should we exclusively look at whether the level of severity of violent incidents increases or decreases (and what about foiled attacks?), or should we focus on whether the impact of an interrelated series of violent events grows or declines, or a combination of the two? And what would be the implications of this? How one responds to this question is likely to depend on the objectives of the study, but we believe it is important to spell out and discuss these decisions in order to make as clear as possible what is and is not, and what can or cannot be, claimed based on the evidence available. This is particularly relevant for an area of research – restraint – that is in its relative infancy and has the potential to feed quite directly into various forms of policy planning.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the valuable and insightful comments of two anonymous reviewers, and the feedback provided by attendees at a workshop on restraint hosted by the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at University of Oslo in January 2020.

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