

Psychic motivations in the post-Fukushima protest movements: a Luhmannian perspective

Andrew Mitchell

Abstract

After the Fukushima disaster in 2011, there were mass protests in Tokyo against nuclear power. Member of the precariat, people unable to find well-paid regular employment, also joined the protests. By 2015 the anti-nuclear protests were atrophying but the SEALDs movement, directed at the Peace and Security Preservation Legislation, popularised youthful political activism. These protest movements however failed to have any influence on government policy: nuclear plants are restarting, the security legislation passed, and even Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution may now be amended.

This paper will look at the psychic motivations of the protestors from the perspective of Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory. By considering protest as the "resistance of communication to communication", I shall discuss the why the protests formed and how they framed their issues, as well as why they failed to have an effect on government policy. I identify the perception of risk/danger and perceived exclusion from the benefits of society's subsystems as key psychic motivators for protest but ones which could not garner enough public opinion to influence government policy in a homogenous Japan.

Introduction

In the wake of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi facility in 2011, a wave of anti-nuclear sentiment swept across Japan. The first anti-nuclear protest movements in Tokyo began soon after and reached their peak in 2012. Whilst there is an ongoing anti-nuclear movement to this day, the movement has now somewhat atrophied.

The new found wave of activism also spurred others to protest. The regaining of power by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 2012, headed once again by the conservative Abe Shinzo, led to new bills being introduced. The most controversial of these was the Peace and Security Preservation Legislation in 2015. This proposed legislation found widespread opposition, with many groups protesting against it. The most famous, or at least the most media friendly and telegenic, was SEALDs: the Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy. Proclaiming that democracy itself was under threat, they protested against this legislation and helped to organise a protest in August 2015 in which over 150,000 participated.

Some scholars (e.g. Oguma, 2016a; Slater, 2012) believed that this marked the beginning of a change in Japanese society, with a new generation of youth engaging in participatory politics outside of the mainstream. This, it was thought, could serve as a critical juncture for Japan and lead to the abandonment of nuclear power in favour of greener and safer power sources, as well as the creation of a Western style welfare state for its aging citizens. The protest movements which emerged seemed to show that there was popular support for change and that the Japanese, characterised as being obedient towards authority and naturally conservative, had awoken democratically and wished to make their voices heard.

These ideas do not seem to have stood the test of time. Despite the anti-nuclear movement and opinion polls showing support for a nuclear free Japan, there has been no effect on central government policy making in regards to nuclear power. Whilst local protest movements have targeted prefectural courts and governors in order to prevent restarts, it has not prompted any form of public debate within the administration about nuclear policy. The SEALDs movement, having failed to prevent or even delay the passing of security legislation in 2015, has now disbanded. The protest movements post-Fukushima, despite their numbers and support received from many areas of Japanese society, have failed to enact any policy change. We are thus left with the question of what the effects of the protest movements were. If we are only to assume their stated aims, to prevent nuclear restarts and to prevent the passage of controversial legislation, then their effect was minimal.

The anti-nuclear protest movements, and the SEALDs movement, represented the first time in a generation that a mass protest movement has taken hold in Japan. The anti-nuclear movement was a clear reaction to the Fukushima disaster and, according to Eiji Oguma (2016a), the appearance of SEALDs demonstrated a change in Japanese society. The SEALDs movement represents both the evolution and the culmination of the mass protest movement which emerged after Fukushima. Their failure to instigate political change, or leave a lasting change in Japanese society, represents a gap in knowledge which cannot be accounted for by considering the protests as expressions of dissent at the level of Japanese politics or broader society.

This paper will seek to fill this gap by attempting to answer what function the post-Fukushima protests served in Japan. I will move away from the concept of protest as a form of participatory politics and instead focus on the psychical motivations of the protestors. I shall discuss the ways the protestors frame their issues through values and morality and how they attempt to perturb other social systems into action (in the case of politics) or in spreading their message (in the case of the mass media). This will allow a better understanding of the nature of the protests to be outlined and why their effects were limited.

By using Luhmann's ideas on protest movements, I will consider them as a sort of autopoietic social system which emerges as the "resistance of communication to communication". Whilst not making up a part of the political system, protest serves as a way for society to communicate about issues to which it would otherwise be blind. These issues may

then enter the political system indirectly as elements which have emerged in its environment, irritating the system's operations. I shall also discuss the limitations on the role of protest movements in society due to their status as an autopoietic system. They can only observe and thus communicate with their own rationality, a rationality which is predicated on the form of protest. They thus differ from other types of movements which organise for the long-run and act as organisations with clear hierarchies and aims.

This failure of the mass protest movements, I suggest, is due to three main reasons. The first is that psychic systems (individuals) eventually move onto new observations as new risks and dangers are observed. The second is that protest movements struggle to maintain themselves in modern society and the post-Fukushima protests were no different. Without a strong political resonance, or a reason for politics to pick up the protestor's themes, the antinuclear and SEALDs movements were only able to maintain themselves for so long. The third is that Japan is for all intents and purposes a homogenous country and this leads to a lack of antagonisms which can be exploited politically. Widespread political engagement is therefore difficult, especially given the previous two reasons.

I shall first discuss how Luhmann describes protest as a consequence of functional differentiation and of alienated psychic observers. I shall then discuss the rise of the anti-nuclear protest movements and the rise of the SEALDs movement, discussing those involved and the ways in which they framed their arguments. I shall highlight the totalising nature of their communication through a refusal to observe from the second-order, and how the mass media plays a key role in modern protests. I shall conclude with a discussion on the divide between protest and politics and how one must understand the way political engagement functions in order to understand the failure of the protests.

Luhmann's theory of protest

It could be thought that Luhmann would have been dismissive towards protest movements given his anti-humanist sociological position. To be sure, he certainly did not see protest movements through any foundationalist framework. He acknowledged the very modern aspect of protest movements, believing that the rise in protest can be linked to the rise in functional differentiation. This allows protest movements to be considered within his general framework, offering a novel way of understanding the role of protest in modern society.

To understand Luhmann's theory of protest, one must understand the specific way in which protest communication arises within his theory. Due to social systems being operationally closed, they cannot access the environment directly. Environmental factors have no impact upon social systems unless they become communications. Facts create no social resonance if they are not the subject of communications: climate temperatures may rise, fish may die in the seas: until this irritates or disturbs a social system and leads to a communication there is no social effect (Luhmann, 1989, pp. 28-29).

Society needs a way to be made aware of problems that have yet to become elements within social systems and communicated about. This can occur from other-reference, the reference of the social system to its environment (i.e. something in the system's environment perturbs it). This does not always happen though. Society may remain blind to elements, unable to see what it cannot see, which may have negative impacts upon its operations.

Luhmann believed that protest allowed such things to be observed and communicated in society. Protest is the way that modern society autopoietically observes itself: "within itself *against* itself" (Luhmann, 2013, p. 164). Protest is a "sort of autopoietic system" which "implement[s] the negation of society in society in operations." It is the resistance to something, namely society's way of constructing reality. Given society cannot 'experience' but through communications, protest works as the "resistance of communication to communication."

Protest is therefore different to social systems which observe both its own operations and the environment through its binary coding, i.e. legal/illegal, government/opposition, etc. In this schema communication is either accepted or rejected by the observing system in question. Protest does not aim to operate within such a system/environment distinction. It draws a boundary within the unity of society against the unity of society, unreflectively considering themselves better than their unmarked side (what they view to be the reality of society) (Luhmann, 2013, p. 154.). Protests operate by blaming society for the way it is.

This is due to the switch to functional differentiation in modern society and the generalisation of values through which society formulates its unity (Luhmann, 2013, p. 154). Protestors protest primarily about values, by protesting as society against society. One is not protesting as an individual or as a group with a vested interest: this is one of the markers which divides it from the old social movements.

In the past it was easier to construct issues and identify the malignant entity or the enemy: landowners were clearly different to serfs, the proletariat could rally against the bourgeoisie. This mode of constructing issues however does not work in modern society as due to function differentiation everybody is formally included within all of society's social subsystems. They do this by reference to inclusion/exclusion and the issues that arise from living in a society being based on decision making: the gap between decision makers and those affected by decisions.

One can be affected by the decision of a company and can protest this decision through email. Protest movements only arise however when the protest serves as a catalyst in its own system formation (Luhmann, 1993, p. 126). Protests become autopoietic systems when they have protest as the form and the topic at hand as the content for their protest. This allows the system to reproduce related communication and distinguish between relevant and irrelevant factors (Luhmann, 1993, p. 127). The system therefore remains closed to its form (protest) but open to topic/occasion.

Luhmann makes it clear that protest movements are different from interactions and organisations, the other two elements of society other than social systems. For Luhmann

protest movements only “secrete” organisation to deal with residual problems and in order to organise a “representation” of the movement (Luhmann, 2013, pp. 155-156). Protest movements lack conditions of membership (having an infinite need for personnel), the ability to specify itself through decisions, the ability to control the process of their own change. The very fluid nature of protests makes organisational analysis insufficient.

Interaction is another aspect that is used by the protestors but, according to Luhmann, this is primarily to “demonstrate the unity and size of the movement.” (Luhmann, 2013, pp. 156-157) Interaction here is a proof of engagement but the participants remain highly individualised; they seek external meanings to resolve the paradox of a freedom from collectivism gained through the invasiveness of the state into their lives. Young people and university graduates, for Luhmann, appear to be most affected by this paradox. Interaction therefore only serves the role in creating the fiction of unity and thus allowing the identity of the protest movement to be created. This though only serves to conceal the function of protest movements, which remain at the level of each psychic system.

As protest movements are a sort of autopoietic system, they cannot be a part of another system. They are not a part of the political system even if they wish to perturb it into action. They exist with protestors on one side and those they are protesting against on the other (usually the decision maker). This structural negation of responsibility means that the protest movements assume that there are others to carry out its demands (Luhmann, 2013, p. 158). Yet there is no attempt to understand the view of those one is protesting about.

Protest movements therefore only observe in relation to protest. In its operations it combines external reference with its own self-reference: external occurrences give the protest movement the motive for internally updating its own motivations for protest. This coding allows a protest movement to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant factors in its environment.

Luhmann’s theory of protest places itself outside of the normative/humanist framework through which they are usually discussed. Protest in a functionally-differentiated society appears as an emergent, sort-of autopoietic system. Unlike other social systems, the protest movement does not view itself through the system/environment distinction but as a unity of society against society. It does this by creating itself through the form of protest, with the other side of the distinction being the addressee (usually the political system). Ethics are usually invoked as the guiding principal for the protest; the totalising nature of their operations means that there is no re-entry into the form of protest to observe one’s own blind spot: to do so would betray the movement.

The anti-nuclear protestors: risk and danger

Risk is for Luhmann not a fact to be observed but a matter of attribution for an observer. This problem of the illusion of safety can be thought of as the problem arising from safety being

a mere communication. Only within communication systems can things be ‘safe’: beyond the system boundary of the observing system lies an environment which is not under control. Safety claims in essence mask the “omnipresent danger that something might happen which the system has no possibility of predicting” (King & Thornhill, 2003, p. 186).

One lives with the illusion of safety communications without being aware of what dangers lie in the environment. It is this belief in the safety of Japanese nuclear power, communicated to the people for decades despite the experiences of the Japanese nation in 1945, which was to be shattered on the 11th March 2011.

Before Fukushima the influence of the anti-nuclear movement had been “virtually nil” on the national level. By April 2011 however separate protests with over ten thousand attendees had taken place (Chandler, 2011). In August 2011 the Hidankyo, representing the fifty thousand survivors of the atomic attacks on Japan, appealed for the halting of new nuclear plants and the phasing out of Japan’s nuclear programme (Fackler, 2011).

As perhaps could be expected, mothers became a vocal element of these protests. According to David Slater, they are unlike the other protesters who critique politics from a position outside of society. They “critique politics from within, at the core of public perceptions of Japanese society and culture, and indeed, from the perspective of the ‘natural’ obligation of reproduction and nurturing another generation” (Slater, 2011). They thus, from this reading, represent a natural core of concerned parties. Hundreds of women took part in protests in 2011, with female protest leaders helping to maintain momentum that was gained from a sixty thousand strong protest in Tokyo in September of that year.

Others made a link between Fukushima and the atomic devastation that Japan had previously suffered. In November 2011 Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe, one of the founders of the Article 9 Association which wishes to preserve Japan’s pacifist constitution, argued that nuclear power needed to be removed from the nation’s energy policy (Kyodo, 2011). Linking nuclear power with nuclear weapons capability, another member of the association stated that “Protecting Article 9 means declaring our stance over how to deal with nuclear power plants”. Others made this link more directly. The term *hibakusha*, used for the survivors of the atomic attacks in 1945, is also used for the victims of Fukushima (Romei, 2017). Fukushima was not just seen as an accident on its own but as a continuation of the nuclear horrors Japan previously suffered.

The anti-nuclear sentiment triggered by Fukushima soon led to many taking to the streets. Mass protests started to take place weekly on Fridays outside the Prime Minister’s office, including marching demos with music that attracted fifteen to twenty thousand people (Manabe, 2013). By June 29 2012, the peak of the protest movement, around two hundred thousand were reported as taking place in the demonstration against nuclear power. In July around seventy five thousand demonstrated in Tokyo against nuclear power (Dickie, 2012).

Many of the protesters within the anti-nuclear movement had little to do with the Tohoku

region where the triple disaster occurred (Slater, 2011). The anti-nuclear movement “brought together an older generation of anti-nuclear activists, young families, hip urbanites, office workers and union protesters.” They saw the nuclear threat as spreading beyond even Japan and thus of concern to all.

The mix of protestors raises the question as to how such a heterogeneous group of people could be brought together under one banner. A Luhmannian approach can describe this as a matter for psychic observers and their observation of danger. Risk is a potential loss which is attributable to a decision made, danger is a potential loss which one could not avoid and is attributed to the environment (Luhmann, 1993, pp. 20-21). Nuclear power for the public is not primarily seen as a risk as one cannot decide on whether to have nuclear power or not. As risk comes down to observation, if the observer believes they did not decide then the risk becomes an environmental danger. In the case of Fukushima, the numerous safety failings and lack of regulatory oversight can easily be seen as a decision; not by oneself but one emanating from one’s environment, namely the Japanese state.

As Luhmann notes, it is a trivial insight to note that not everybody can participate in making all decisions (Luhmann, 1993, p. 105). There is a gap between decision makers and those affected by decisions that cannot be bridged. Fukushima exposed the illusion of safety communication bare, leading to a resentment towards those who, and towards the system which, made the decisions. Protestors protest against decisions made which they believe expose them to danger. This was the case for the post-Fukushima anti-nuclear protestors and can explain why such a disparate group of individuals came together in order to protest. They remained individuals however, brought together through a temporary cause. The anti-nuclear cause was driven more by private citizens rather than anti-nuclear organisations and this lack of mutual trust between different groups led to a lack of wider organisation (Dickie, 2012).

The atrophy of the antinuclear movement

In Luhmannian terms danger is unknowable, being part of the environment and unavoidable in principal due to it not being based on decisions (though this is a matter of attribution: one can attribute the loss to the refusal to make a decision one ought to have). A protest movement based on a single topic which exposes the dangers presented to the public by decision-makers can only last so long. Given the passage of time, all systems, be they social systems or psychic ones, observe new risks and dangers. The passage of time also leads to the perception of a reduction in risk.

The anti-nuclear core believed that it was winning its battle. Due to the drastic increase in national nuclear safety standards and local protests against nuclear plants in local areas, by May 2012 all of Japan’s nuclear plants were dormant. Two reactors in Fukui prefecture restarted soon after but by November 2013 Japan was once again a nuclear power free country (Kan, 2017, p. 140). This led Oguma to claim that this was “because the general will of the people

is strongly opposed to nuclear power.” (Oguma, 2013). Unlike Germany which had merely set itself on a path to a nuclear free country, Japan had mothballed all its nuclear reactors. The reason for this was because the Japanese people no longer wanted nuclear power and the strength of this demand had “overcome the resistance of the government, the bureaucracy and the business community”.

The point of view of Oguma, which was in line with many of those commenting on Fukushima who thought that the disaster would lead to the emergence of a new civil society in Japan, was that something had awoken in the Japanese people. After reaching its zenith in 2012 however, the subsequent decay in the popularity of the anti-nuclear movement would raise questions about the viability of holding such an opinion.

By the summer of 2012 questions were being raised as to the popularity of the movements. Local organisers claimed that a July 2012 protest held in Tokyo was attended by one hundred and seventy thousand attendees, NHK reported the number of seventy five thousand. Whilst still a large number, the portrayal of the movement by organisers and the reality of it began to diverge. This became more apparent as the protest movement started to lose its momentum.

Writing in December 2013, Oguma noted that some claim that popular will soon cools (Oguma, 2013). He believed however that public opinion was, almost three years after Fukushima, demanding an end to nuclear power even more. Despite his beliefs, the anti-nuclear movement was clearly atrophying.

In August 2015 the Sendai nuclear reactor was restarted and began to once more supply electricity (Kyuden, 2015). This was in line with the new government policy to have an energy mix of around 22% nuclear by 2030. Oguma (2015b), writing a few days after this announcement, displayed a somewhat more shocked tone compared to his earlier writings. He quoted the chairman of the advisory committee on energy as saying “I sometimes wonder if Japan has really reflected on Fukushima” and that the Japanese people are “opposed to the insincere and irresponsible stance of the government and the industrial circles”.

By the time of the fifth anniversary of the meltdowns, Japan’s anti-nuclear movement was struggling to maintain momentum (Aoki, 2016). The Friday rallies were by March 2016 attracting less than a thousand people. One Kanagawa resident was quoted in the news as saying that “even if many are opposing the use of nuclear energy, their overall interest in energy policy is not that strong.” A board member of Friends of the Earth Japan believed that “since the LDP attained its grip on power, our voices do not seem to reach the government”. As of May 2017 these rallies are still being held outside the Prime Minister’s Office (Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes, 2017). There is no indication however of any recovery in the atrophying numbers of attendees.

Protest movements are stuck in a bind: being temporary systems which take their form as protest, and having an infinite need for members, means that they must constantly reinvent themselves to keep their momentum going. Protest movements only have two ends

for Luhmann: they either succeed and therefore signal their own imminent demise, or they fail to achieve their demands and thus lose support. The anti-nuclear protests were a very specific protest movement which came about due to a very specific disaster. The ability for the protest to reinvent itself, to make more radical demands, was limited by its topic. Its topic helped sustain the movement for a long time but eventually news cycles move on and individuals, forever in the process of forgetting, move on to other things or forget the way they perceived the danger emanating from other's risky decisions. Despite the wishes of Oguma, public opinion does soon cool even when faced with the danger of nuclear disaster.

The Fukushima disaster did not seem to present enough danger over enough time for people to demand wide-ranging changes to Japanese nuclear policy, let alone demand wholesale changes in Japanese politics. It failed to provide the critical juncture for the Japanese public that was envisioned by some scholars. Luhmann's theory highlights just how hard it is to enact wide-ranging changes across society due to the nature of functional differentiation. The protest movements lacked the power to perturb other subsystems of society enough to create change.

The precariat and exclusion from the centre

One type of involved individual which deserves a more thorough investigation, and who cannot be categorised so easily as motivated by the perception of danger, is the precariat. The term, a neologism popularised by Guy Standing, describes the emergence of a new working group across the world which has access only to unstable and usually low-paid labour (Yelland, 2015). Unlike the working class of previous generations, the precariat have a wide range of education levels and rely on short-term contracts or freelance work. Whilst this is a worldwide phenomenon, according to Standing recent research shows that over half of the Japanese workforce is made up of precariat.

Writing in 2013, Akihiro Ogawa discussed the role of the precariat in Japan's anti-nuclear movement. Focusing on the case of Ryota Sono, a thirty year old member of the precariat, Sono discusses how he believes that the placement of nuclear plants in poorer rural areas is a form of discrimination (Ogawa, 2013, p. 322). The placement of these plants allowed the quality of life of those in urban areas to be maintained at the cost of placing the dangers associated with such a technology on the shoulders of those in more marginal areas.

Oguma also picked up this theme of the precariat. Focusing on the "cognitive precariat", Oguma discussed how those who are highly educated but are in irregular work brought their skills to the protest movements (Oguma, 2016b). In a survey he conducted as to the characteristics of the participants at the anti-nuclear protests, he found that many were members of this specific type of precariat (Oguma, 2016a, pp. 7-8). The involvement of the precariat is notable in its indication of the lack of participation from members of Japan's "core": salarymen and students. This group, either being integrated into Japanese society or wishing to be in the future, did not make up a significant presence among the main actors within the

movement (Oguma, 2016a, pp. 10-11).

Oguma's research coincides with Slater's observation that many of those protesting were not directly affected parties. The precariat's focus was not solely on the possibility of another Fukushima; their focus was on what they perceived to be the structural failings in Japanese society. These failings led to the problems the residents in the Fukushima area faced, and the ones they faced in their own lives.

The protestors for Oguma embodied a feeling of general malaise directed at the core of Japanese society, with Fukushima as the spark which lit the keg of protest. Missing within this movement however is traditional political activism and clear demands. The addressee could be ostensibly be considered as the government. There seemed to be a focus however on a perception of a Japanese society that had let the precariat down rather than a focus on mobilising protestors towards a common goal.

The same problem of being affected by decisions holds for the precariat; the form of their grievance however is different. In the case of those who were protesting merely against nuclear, one could assume the nuclear dangers they perceived themselves as facing were motivation enough. The precariat however view themselves as outside of Japan's "core" and therefore, within systems terms, on the periphery of society.

To understand the precariat and their relationship to the protest movements, a division must be made based on the relationship of the precariat to the social system they are operating within. Nobody can formally be excluded from any social system based on their social status or origin: access to the performance of the social subsystems is, in this formal sense, open to everyone (Brunczel, 2010, p. 169). It is clear on an empirical level however that some people have more chance to make use of the benefits of functional subsystems than others. The precariat believe themselves to be excluded from fair access to these subsystems and thus protested. Their access to different subsystems varies however. They, as members of the electorate, have the same voting rights as any other citizen. They protest that they are excluded from other subsystems, in particular the economic one. One must therefore separate the precariat into holders of political rights and of people who feel marginalised due to a sense of exclusion from other social subsystems.

Luhmann makes a clear distinction between centre and periphery (Luhmann, 2013, pp. 157-158). As discussed before, protest movements see themselves as holding a responsibility for society by being against it. The protest movements remain within society but act as if they were outside it. The protestors, being those affected by decisions, view themselves as on the periphery of society. This applies to all protestors. Without a centre to protest against, protestors would not be able to form themselves due to the lack of an addressee for which to direct their grievances at. This achievement, of placing oneself at the periphery of a system, allows the protest movement to gain "goal-directed mobilisation" and therefore act as an autopoietic system. The precariat in this sense are attempting to perturb the Japanese state through their

protests and in this way they are no different that the protesters that were discussed before.

The difference with the precariat though is that they see themselves as a marginalised group within Japan, pushed onto the periphery not just by the nuclear decisions in which they could not take part but also through exclusion from social subsystems. The main perception of exclusion emanates from the inability to gain permanent and well-paid employment, i.e. they feel excluded from the economic system. More specifically they feel that structural limitations stop them from joining organisations (companies) where they would receive a good salary and thus be able to participate more easily in the other social subsystems. Due to the nature of functionally differentiated society this also means potential exclusion from, for example, the education and healthcare systems. This exclusion is not formal but due to the nature of functional systems, exclusion from one (and especially one as important as the economic system) often leads to exclusion from others.

Luhmann describes this problem as the problem of the welfare state where individuals see the role of politics to not only make binding decisions but also to ensure inclusion in the functional subsystems (see Brunczel, 2010, pp. 168-172; Luhmann, 1990). Luhmann believes this is problematic as it overburdens the political system with demands that it cannot hope to fulfil as it cannot directly control other social subsystems in order to do this. The attempt requires money and law; as the welfare state grows demands are made for even more inclusion which entails the need for even more money and laws in order to fulfil them. The problem with this is it soon impedes on the operations of the economic system as it has to meet political demands, either through increased taxes or through complying with various new laws. The end result, Luhmann believes, is disappointment as new demands cannot be met and current commitments will have to be rolled back due to a lack of money to pay for them.

These demands do not have anything to do with the Fukushima nuclear disaster per se; they are demands for access to social subsystems rather than demands to not have to live with the danger of other people's decisions. Luhmann notes that once protest movements disperse they can leave behind a "general residuum of protest potential from which, given favourable opportunities, new movements can form" (Luhmann, 1993, p. 142). The precariat, no doubt motivated in the same way as the other protestors, protested against the nuclear dangers they were exposed to. The "general residuum of protest potential" however also led to protest against the perceived exclusion from functional subsystems they experienced due to their marginalisation in Japanese society.

The precariat conflated the demand for better access to social subsystems with that of the exposure to danger from the decisions made by others. Their motivation for participation in the post-Fukushima protests has to be considered as arising from a number of factors, the two main ones being as parties affected by decisions and from those excluded from other social subsystems.

The rise of SEALDs

As the wave of protest against nuclear power began to recede, a new group was forming which aimed to capture the zeitgeist and protest against the centre itself. This group, the Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs), wished to harness the general discontent of Japanese citizens in order to bring Japan back to its modern roots as a constitutional democracy.

According to Kingston (2015), SEALDs were “part of a post-3.11 continuum of protests by citizens angered by the Fukushima nuclear reactor meltdowns, Abe’s 2012 secrecy legislation that undermined transparency, accountability and democratic values, government inaction in the face of racist assaults on the rights of resident ethnic Koreans and right-wing vigilantism targeting the liberal media that in 2014 Abe publically applauded in the Diet.” The protest potential had been utilised by group with a much wider aim.

The movement was, in part, the brainchild of Aki Okuda, a student who started by attending anti-nuclear protests and was dismayed by what he considered to be the lack of believable information about what was going on (Gingold, 2016). The turning point for Okuda was the State Secrecy Law, controversial legislation which opponents say criminalises whistleblowing and could be used to crackdown on political dissent (McCurry, 2014). In Okuda’s words, “It felt like the government had gone too far… things were just so out of balance, I felt I had to do something to stop it.” (Gingold, 2016)

Forming in early 2015, SEALDs set their sights on trying to block the Peace and Security Preservation Legislation proposed by the Abe administration. This may have given the protest a direct aim but its remit was, unlike the preceding anti-nuclear movement, far more diverse than a focus on one topic. SEALDs said they wished to protect Japan’s liberal democratic values and promote the constitution (Kingston, 2015). The movement portrayed its struggle in terms of a struggle against fascism: Okuda was often seen sporting a T-shirt emblazoned with “Destroy Fascism”. Images of Abe as Hitler were common at the demos (Slater, O’Day, Uno, Takano, & Kindstrand, 2015). These were mixed with posters stating “this is what democracy looks like”, which also served as a common call and respond chant during demos. The fight against the security bill was not just a fight against a single piece of legislation: it was portrayed as a fight for the soul of modern, democratic, Japan.

The image of student protestors in Japan has a much more negative connotation than the one in the West. The student protests in the 1960s Japan included tactics such as a willingness to engage in violence with the police, leading to the death of a student (Steinhoff, 1999). The student protest movement began in 1960 with protests against ANPO¹ and moved onto to ones demanding American withdrawal from Vietnam and other social/environmental issues. This

1 The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, signed in 1960 by Nobusuke Kishi, the grandfather of current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

led to a crackdown on student movements in Japan and the depoliticisation of Japan's student population, effects that could be seen in the aftermath of Fukushima with the lack of student participation. It was this state of affairs that the SEALDs movement wish to correct: their wish to normalise activism can be considered in this light. SEALDs were trying to "build a new political culture" and implement "the politics of the regular" (Kingston, 2015).

The SEALDs members however were not really from regular society. Their makeup was markedly different from the heterogeneous crowds at the anti-nuclear protests and the members of the precariat. According to O'Day (2015), SEALDs members were overwhelmingly from elite private universities and spoke openly about their hopes for integrating into mainstream Japanese society after graduation². Oguma (2016b) considers many SEALDs as members of the cognitive precariat, citing the large student loans that SEALDs as students have³. Whilst the specifics of the position of SEALDs members within society may be questioned, they did not view the movement as their lives and viewed their political involvement as something they had the freedom to do. There is a clear distinction between SEALDs and their movement directed at stopping the security legislation, and the precariat one which contained a less directed but more radical demand for change; one based on their socio-economic position in Japan.

If many of the anti-nuclear protestors were motivated by a perception of an exposure to danger, and the precariat furthermore by a feeling of exclusion, it leads to the question as to what motivated SEALDs. These two factors evidently played a large part in the motivations for members but the movement represented something beyond these previous protest incarnations. As mentioned before, for Luhmann protestors in the contemporary age are usually the young or graduates - people who are sensitive to the paradox of the freedom gained from others at the price of a constitutional state which invades into every aspect of an individual's life. Protests are to do with identity and serve a psychic function for the participants. The protestors, whilst stating that they did not make the protest the centre of their lives, certainly seemed to exhibit this sense of alienation and a sense of anger towards decision-makers. They still see themselves as exposed to the dangers of other's decisions, in this case those of the Abe administration and the potential effects of proposed legislation. Their lack of exclusion from functional subsystems however, in conjunction with their age and position as students, would suggest that their protest was more about their identity in relation to the state rather than as affected parties.

The framing of demands and the totalising nature of protest

As mentioned earlier, Luhmann identifies another element of the protest movement which differs from social movements in the past. The old social movements criticised society through

2 The threat of not being about to enter the mainstream due to the tarnish of previous activism was a fear of SEALDs members (e.g. Okunuki (2015)).

3 In a conversation I had with a former SEALDs member in 2017, he believed that most of the members were poor and did not share the view that SEALDs was a movement which was made up of elites.

appeal to concrete manifestations of the malignant entity, working conditions and pay for example. Modern protest movements, lacking the ability to refer to a well-known strata or class, must use its own topic in order to illuminate society and thus find out what it is to be criticised.

Such use of topics can be tricky as the topic of protest must be confirmed in every new situation in order to maintain its relevance. Being based on a topic means that the movement is dependent on the topic it has highlighted, a topic that exists quasi-independently of the protest movement. As time progresses the communications surrounding the topic shift, as does wider public opinion towards it.

Wishing to be more than a single topic movement, SEALDs had to create its own image and framing. Slater (2015) uses the concept of framing to discuss the way in which SEALDs created the issues they protested about. One member was quoted as saying “Issues are socially constructed... so someone has to say that this is an issue in order to make it into an issue... Things become an issue only when somebody points it out.” This concept of framing has received attention in mainstream social movement theory (e.g. Benford & Snow, 2000). From a systems perspective, such framing is an internal system construct.

In Slater’s analysis of SEALDs he discusses the reliance the movement has on framing and communicating their issues, issues which themselves are necessarily constructs. The SEALDs members are fully aware of their creation of issues, of identifying areas in which they themselves feel affected and feel the need to highlight this to society at large. Luhmann’s discussion on the nature of ecological communication can describe this well. In the same way dead fish are not a problem for society until they are communicated about, the problems that the SEALDs believe Japan faced are not part of communication until communicated about. The movement creates its own topics autopoietically and communicates these to society through the form of protest.

The self-descriptions of the protestors in their protesting, e.g. “this is what democracy looks like”, should not be confused with representing reality but as representing only one cognitively constructed reality. It is the use of a specific topic that is used to discover what is to be criticised in society. Protest is not the import of content from the environment into the protest system, it constructs the content internally and then assigns this construct to the environment. Protests create their own topics for communication, they do not ‘discover’ problems and protest against them. A polluted river is not an element in society until it perturbs a social system in order for it to be communicated about, thus entering society. The protestors operate in a similar manner but within society, as the other side of society. They perturb other social systems with their communications but these communications have no reality apart from as the first-order observational reality of the protest movement.

This point is often lost when observing protest movements, as due to their nature they often speak about events that resonate with all members in a society. To be anti-nuclear or anti-

war seems perfectly natural due to the success of these protest movements in making these topics readily available within political communication. Like all communication however it has no underlying reality as such; it is merely a description of reality, emerging from a particular system, which is then observed by other observers.

One of the notable aspects of the protests against the security legislation in 2015 was the focus of the protest movement on Abe Shinzo, the prime minister of Japan. Chanting “Abe yamero!” (Abe quit!), the security bill was not seen as one that had been drafted and proposed for law through to a democratic process in which multiple lawmakers participated. It was seen by SEALDs as a personal assault on the democratic process of Japan by a fascist leader.

The issue of framing comes strongly to the fore. As Kusche notes, systems theory argues that framing highlights the difference between decision makers on one hand and those who are affected by the decisions on the other (Kusche, 2016, p. 82). The protesters, in order to maintain the view that democracy in Japan is a system which should represent their views, had to represent the situation as if democracy had been hijacked by Abe for his own ends. The identification of Abe as the addressee of the communication emanating from the protest movement simplifies this matter. Abe is the head of the LDP and therefore the one responsible for the security bill. The other side of the distinction is not the protestors but the entire population of Japan, those who live with the inability to control the ramifications of the decision.

The protestors focused on an adulation of Japan’s democracy whilst insisting that it, in this instance, no longer exists. This seeming contradiction cannot be understood in terms of system functioning, nor can it be considered in a more rational sense. The communication emanating from the protest movements is moralising and based on values. The discussion on nuclear power policy post-Fukushima, or on security legislation, does not move beyond the initial observation. It becomes a question of morality itself which, through its very formation, refuses to be bound by the logic of social systems. It is totalising in the sense that it aims to go beyond society by making an ontological claim which includes everybody within its communication (whether those whom it claims to speak for want it to or not).

Such communications are first order observations that refuse to re-enter themselves. These moral claims however still within modern society as they make direct reference to the operation of a functional subsystem. The protest movement in Japan located this within the Japanese state, or more specifically it located the affront to morality in the figure of the head of the cabinet, Abe Shinzo.

The lack of a hierarchy of values means that decision-making becomes more flexible: a decision can be justified now as a matter of freedom; it can later be modified by appealing to equality (Kusche, 2016, p. 83). One of the achievements of the modern political system, in what we often term democracy, is the ability for it to operate in this manner. This allows it to change its mind, so to speak, by appealing to different modes of rationality. The totalising morality of

the demands of the protestors both wishes to restore a sense of freedom to the system whilst inserting into it a guiding moral narrative, one which would only serve to reduce the ability of the political system to act in a manner we could call democratic. The demands placed on the system in terms of requirements for its operations would, in practice, require the abandonment of democracy and its ability to switch between values when describing its decisions. It would replace this with a unitary code which could not later be questioned.

The anti-nuclear movement it could be argued are representing reality as they are campaigning against the events at Fukushima and the potential for similar ones to occur. This position however would ignore the insight of Luhmann that ecology is not society; that ecological concerns only become concerns for society through communication. Whilst it is very clear that Fukushima has impacted a great many people and led them to protest against the damage it caused, it is only socially relevant because it became a social communication due to the massive disturbances created in the environment of various functional subsystems. The protest movement against nuclear power is no different in this regard, being an emergent subsystem due to the societal perturbations caused by Fukushima.

Protest movements act as irritants to other functional subsystems through their demands that other subsystems take up their demands and solve them. The protestors refuse the responsibility of taking to hand the problem of solving the issue. Due to its totalising worldview, one which arises through a refusal to observe as a second-order observer, it confuses its demands with reality itself. The viability of the demands is never questioned. The realisation of protest aims cannot be understood through observing the protest, it can only be understood by observing how the political subsystem observes the protest as an element in its environment. The totalising nature of protest communication then not only fails to account for itself as a subjective observer, it also fails to account for how politics observes the demands protestors make.

The mass media and protests

So far I have failed to discuss one of the most important features of any modern protest movement, that of its relationship with the mass media. It seems obvious that protest movements rely on the mass media to spread their message, or at the very least in order to gain attention. One can see this in the way protestors organise their protests in order to gain media attention.

SEALDs had a huge media presence and seemed to be acutely aware of what the media wanted. Female leaders were interviewed less than their male counterparts but made it into the mass media more often. Their banners and slogans were in many ways designed to be provocative. SEALDs members have featured on the covers of prominent Japanese fashion and culture magazines. Their protest from the beginning was aimed at, according to Okuda, changing the image of protestors so that anybody could openly discuss politics (Gingold, 2016).

Even though they were accused by some of favouring style over substance, Koichi Nakano, a Japanese politics professor, commented that “SEALDs projects the image that you can be normal and fashionable and political at the same time.” (McCurry, 2015).

The aim of a protest movement is to gain popular support, and it does this through capturing the attention of the public. Public opinion in Luhmann’s theory does not operate as allowing one to observe a reasonable ground for judgement, it acts by “rendering possible the observation of observations” (Luhmann, 1993, p. 141). This observing of observers is done by the mass media system which, whilst not having an exclusive claim on constructing reality, plays the key role in representing the public (Luhmann, 2000, pp. 103-105)⁴. It is this reaction of the public which has to be taken into account when one wishes to confirm the importance to society of the protest.

This reliance on the mass media as the way to observe public opinion is not the only role mass media plays. As the protests remain outside of the political system, the only way for their communication to be picked up by politics is to employ “drastic means”. This is often done through a “covert alliance” with the mass media.

Luhmann believed that there is structural coupling between protest movement and the mass media (Luhmann, 2013, p. 163). Protesters stage “pseudo-events” which are produced for the purposes of being reported. This is to draw attention to the movement rather than attract members. The protestors plan their activities based on this, keeping an eye on “the willingness of the mass media to report on them and on their telegenic qualities”.

This coupling with the mass media though means that the protestors require distance from the trigger event and a supply of new events upon which the media can report. As ever with system time, synchronicity is rarely the case. The mass media moves quickly from topic to topic, introducing new information to its audiences⁵. The protestors risk becoming non-information and losing the media’s attention if nothing changes.

One of the hallmarks of the anti-nuclear protests was the involvement of Japanese musicians and music. Ryuichi Sakamoto believed that as politicians were not representing the best interests of the people there was little choice but to protest directly: taking part in the protests not as a musician but as a participant (Manabe, 2015, p. 92). Soul Flower Union also took a vocal lead in the anti-nuclear protest movements by giving free concerts (Manabe, 2015, p. 100), with a slogan of theirs “The Nuclear Era is Over if you want it” being shown across

4 The proliferation of smartphones and related mass media technologies such as Twitter etc., which essentially allow the circumnavigation of conventional mass media organisations and outlets, adds a new dimension to the creation of public opinion.

5 The mass media system’s coding is the distinction between information and non-information (Luhmann, 2000, p. 17).

6 This message was possibly derived from John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s message “War is over! If you want it”. By the time of the protests against security legislation in 2015, this anti-war message had been picked up by the protestors directly, though not generally acknowledged (Slater, O’Day, Uno, Takano, & Kindstrand, 2015). This highlights the use of popular motifs in order to aid media resonance and wider communication.

banners during the protests (Williamson, Piers, 2012, p. 9)⁶.

The prominent role of Sakamoto in the anti-nuclear protest movements can be seen as him using his fame to set an example for ordinary Japanese citizens (Manabe, 2012). This was seen as important within a society which is not known for popular demonstrations. The concerts Sakamoto helped to organise, based on the acts present, also seem to have been constructed to be appealing to Japanese youth. Several members said “I came here because artists I liked were on the program. I had thought there was little I could do. From now on, I will do what I can, little by little.” (Manabe, 2012).

The two day music concert No Nukes 2012 was attended by eight thousand five hundred people, with the internet stream of the concert being viewed over half a million times (Manabe, 2012). Such events gave a way to popularise the movement whilst giving the media both a topic and spectacle on which to report.

Such successes of combining music events in order to raise awareness and generate media attention were not to last: attempts to do this at the Fuji Rock festival in 2016 met with criticism (Asahi Shimbun, 2016). Journalist Daisuke Tsuda, who was to host a discussion with Okuda at Fuji Rock at a session called “Atomic Café”, was quoted as saying “It appears that elements that do not look kindly on having an individual who has been critical of the current administration appear at a noted event like Fuji Rock are using the logic that politics should not be brought into music.” This, if taken at face value, would seem to mark a drastic shift from the image of music as a medium to engage the young with political activism.

The protest movements in Japan caught the eye of the world media, especially the SEALDs movement. This is something that the protestors were well aware of. Many protestors used English language signs in order to gain recognition in the eyes of foreign audiences. The No Nukes concert and the concerts organised by SEALDs during 2015 also seem to have a double-function; rather than just encouraging people to express themselves and become politically aware at the same time, the concerts seemed to have a certain telegenic property to them, making them perfect for the mass media. The mass media has an insatiable desire for new information, in other words for new topics and change. Concerts appeal to this need of the mass media system, allowing the protestors’ message to be broadcast in an exciting way.

As the mass media operates on information, the mass protests needed to create events in order to present the media with something new to report. Music events, rallies, telegenic personnel; these all caught the media’s attention and led to a continuation of media output related to the protests. The relationship between the two, in the absence of any new events for both systems to form communications about, means that there is a limit on how long the media will pay attention to a protest movement that needs to continually reinvent itself in order to provide stories for news. The empirical evidence shows that even the concert-going public began to tire of this association and reacted negatively to it. Protest is limited in its ability to keep itself relevant, either through successes in perturbing other subsystems or in providing the

media with something to report.

The reliance on other subsystems means that protest movements find themselves caught in a trap. Their totalising view of society is not shared by others; the media does not operate on morals or values but on whether something is new information or not (and depending on the news organisation whether such information fits its agenda). In the same manner that risk perceptions eventually shift and this leads to less interest in the protest, the mass media will also find itself seeking more novel information to communicate. The overdependence of protest movements on mass media serves as a factor limiting their longevity and effectiveness.

The disbanding of SEALDs

In 2015 the aims of the SEALDs movement were lofty: whilst believing that preventing the passage of security legislation may be tricky, they thought that the public backlash against the bill may make the LDP wary of pursuing other things such as constitutional reform (Sieg & Kasai, 2015). At this time strong themes related to the power of youth and the assertion that Abe was a fascist were the cohesion that kept the disparate group members together.

By 2016, with the failure to prevent the passing of the security legislation, the movement was beginning to atrophy. The SEALDs movement was, according to its members, only going to continue for a short period of time, with the date of disbandment set for after the upper house elections in July of that year (Mainichi Japan, 2016). Aki Okuda stated that he gave SEALDs a score of 50 on the grounds that it failed to have security legislation scrapped but had “achieved a trend of having citizens raising their voices.”

Their legacy does not seem to have stood the test of time. In 2017 constitutional reform has become an official aim of the Abe administration and there seems to be no strong presence on the streets outside the Prime Minister’s office, nor on social media, to fight against this. So why did the SEALDs movement fail to influence public opinion enough to prevent or delay this?

It is often said that the Japanese are a very homogenous nation and at the surface level this would seem to hold true. Yet the serenity of Japanese society is not historically based. The student movements in the 1960s led to mass violence and death for some of the participants. During the same period, new arrivals from the rural areas into the cities found themselves alienated; according to Oguma (2015a) some of these would join the protests on the basis of which one they were most likely to be able to get into a fight in. Yet these recollections of Japan have a sense of unreality attached to them given the state of affairs today.

Japan’s economic boom, lasting until the 1980s, led to a surge in household incomes and raising living standards for most. This led to the perception to many that Japan was a middle class country and all Japanese were as well. Whilst this perception may not match up to the data, it led to a certain ideal of Japanese society to take hold in the Japanese, one where most believed themselves to be part of the core of Japanese society.

This association with the core, as I have discussed earlier, is one of the reasons that people

in modern society find motivation to protest. A sense of exclusion from the core leads to a protest towards the core. In Japan the precariat feel alienated with no chance to change their position: they do not see themselves as middle class Japanese. SEALDs on the other hand most certainly did. Their movement tried to involve those in the core against the core, or more specifically they tried to involve those in the core against the perception of a threat to a destruction of the core's values (and by proxy their access to it).

This problem of political engagement due to a perception of a homogenous middle class has been discussed in different contexts since at least the 1990s. Gerald Curtis for example believed that only something like mass layoffs would lead to a deeply polarising division in Japanese society and spur voters into antagonistic groupings (Curtis, 1999, pp. 166-167). The Fukushima disaster held the potential to do this but once the situation came under control the protests lost their momentum.

SEALDs, despite their best framing efforts, did not present an image of Japan which spurred enough people onto the streets or into the voting booths. The middle class image of Japan, and the subsequent belonging within the core of Japanese society which this invokes, has not been broken down by the image of nuclear catastrophe nor by the image of fascism.

Conclusion

Protests in Japan serve the same function that they do in every society: that of exposing to the function subsystems things they are blind to. Through the protest movements many hidden elements of Japanese society emerged. The precariat and the Fukushima mother joined together and protested against nuclear power and the state of Japanese society. The SEALDs movement as the vanguard of the security legislation protests revealed the cognitive proletariat and the perceived lack of meaningful political engagement in Japan.

The single issue topic of nuclear power started to hold less interest for people as time went on. The media resonance, representative of public opinion, atrophied rapidly after the failure of the SEALDs movement to gain any compromise from the government. Japanese public opinion moved onto other issues, leaving the issues raised by marginalised members of Japanese society without any political affiliation.

Protest movements in Japan displayed many of the characteristics Luhmann discusses in his works: many were youth suffering from a sense of alienation in society who found a voice for their concerns in protest. It also helps to frame the totalising sense of values held by the movements, the desire for media coverage, and the construction of the issues at hand. More importantly however is the way in which a Luhmannian analysis gives a better sense of how the protests worked. By observing the movements as a sort-of autopoietic system, one is able to consider how the protestors as observers observe and how they construct internally their framing for protest.

The protest movements post Fukushima highlighted the various ways in which psychic

systems are perturbed by social forces. The exposure to danger from other's decisions led to many taking part in the protests, the creation of a protest environment led others to protest with a different set of demands. Their failure to enact any political change, despite their popularity and resonance with the Japanese public, shows the limits of protest in modern society. Protest does not necessarily perturb the political system nor do its demands necessarily have a permanent impact on the operations of society's subsystems. The protest movements post-Fukushima highlight both the effect of modern society on the individual and the individual's impotence in affecting society.

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ポストフクシマの抗議運動における精神的な動機：ルーマンの視点

アンドリュー・ミッチェル・ニール

2011年の福島災害の後、東京には原子力発電に反対する大規模な抗議が行われた。また、賃金の高い正規雇用の職者が見つからない人々も、抗議集会に参加した。2015年までに反核抗議は萎縮しているが、安全保障法制に向けられた SEALDs の動きは、若者の政治的活動を大衆一般化させた。しかし、これらの抗議運動は政府の政策に影響を与えず、原子力発電所は再開され、憲法第9条は修正される可能性がある。

この論文では、ニクラス・ルーマンの社会システム理論の観点から、抗議者の心理的動機を調べる。抗議を「コミュニケーションに対するコミュニケーションの抵抗」とみなすことによって、抗議が形成された理由とその問題の枠組みと、なぜ彼らが政府の政策に影響を与えなかったのかを論じる。リスク/危険の知覚と、社会の諸サブシステムの諸利益からの排除の知覚が、抗議の心理的動機づけの鍵であること。またこれらは、同質性の高い日本において、政府の政策に影響を及ぼすほどの世論を作り出すことができなかったことを指摘する。