

The Sociology of Social Movements

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by

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The study of social movements is among one of the largest and most broadly conceived of all the many sub-fields within the discipline of sociology. While some researchers study the rise of specific social movement organizations at particular points in history, other researchers look at macro-level trends and events in an attempt to link various large scale demographic, economic and political transformations to the emergence of regional, national, and even global social movements (Goldstone 1991; Tarrow 1998). The diversity of approaches used to study different forms of collective action also vary widely. Some researchers focus their attention on the media and its impact on social movement actors (McAdam et al. 1996), while others look at the impact of poverty and social class on the rise of social movements (Piven and Cloward 1977; Piven and Cloward 1988). There are yet other scholars who explore identity factors and the emergence of new sets of common interests that unite disparate peoples across great physical distances and from different cultures and political systems (Laclau 1985; Melucci 1996; Slater 1985). As if the breadth of different modes of inquiry into social movements weren't enough, researchers also work on groups of vastly differing sizes. William Gamson conducted a series of controlled laboratory experiments with small groups of individuals in order to study the way that collective action frames are constructed through small group conversations (Gamson 1992). On the other hand, Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol and Sydney Tarrow have studied social revolutions at the national and cross-national levels. While the former studied groups of four and five individuals, the latter examined groups that range in size from one to one hundred million (Skocpol 1994; Tarrow 1998; Tilly ; Tilly 1978).

The variety of methods that are applied to the study of social movements, and the tremendous variation in the type of questions being asked, demonstrates one of the most important lessons for students of social movements: There is no single definition of a social movement. More than that however, there is no single method for studying social movements nor is there any sense of agreement as to the particular types of questions that should be asked about the movements themselves. In fact, the very idea that there exists a single “sub-field” within sociology that contains within it all possible permutations of the study of social movements is problematic (Melucci 1996). It is important to remind the reader of this fact for several reasons. First, if we are reminded of the number of different ways to approach the study of social movements, we can begin to examine the connections that exist between different sub-fields within, and without, sociology and other related disciplines. The work of Sydney Tarrow provides a good example of how the connections between political science, economics and sociology can help us to better understand how, and why, it is that social movements get started. Tarrow’s work combines some of the insights of economics with the macro-structural focus of political science to propose a theory that accounts for the cyclical nature of social protest activity.

Another reason why it is important to be reminded of the tremendous variety of different methodological, theoretical and substantive approaches to the study of social movements is because of the broad and inclusive nature of sociology itself. As a social science, sociology is notable because it draws on the disciplines of history, political science, economics, geography, art, and even the physical & biological sciences in order to come to a fuller understanding of the relationship between the individual and society. Yet, because of the large number of disciplinary influences, sociology has a tendency to be both

comprehensive, and extremely broad. The purpose of this paper is to make sense out of large number of approaches to the study of social movements. While my immediate task is necessarily general and introductory, I do go into more detail in the final section of the paper. In the final section, I consider some contemporary examples of Latin American social movements and I then apply several different theories in order to flesh out the details of contemporary theoretical approaches and their objects of study.

My specific area of interest within the study of social movements is broadly known as collective identity. I am particularly interested in the different ways that individuals conceptualize and constitute group identities; and more specifically, the role that these group identities play in the production and control of cultural, economic and political resources. The specific forms of identity that interest me most are best described as ethno-cultural. By studying the linkages between specific ethno-cultural identities and the production/control of resources, my goal is to come to a better understanding of different dimensions of collective identity and their socioeconomic repercussions.

Theoretical Traditions: Marx, Durkheim & Smith

The study of contemporary social movements comes largely out of three different theoretical traditions, functionalism, Marxism and liberal-individualism. The theorists most clearly associated with each of these traditions are Karl Marx, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim and early Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and especially Adam Smith. Durkheim was extremely influential in the theoretical formation of the discipline of sociology itself and his influences can be felt in most sub-fields of sociology including collective behavior and social movements. While Durkheim neither

conceived of, nor studied, social movements in the same fashion that contemporary social movement researchers do, his most lasting contribution to the discipline is the theoretical tradition known as functionalism (Durkheim 1938). While Durkheim was himself a product of the intellectual environment of mid 19th century France, his work represents a unique synthesis of *Comte's* positivism and Durkheim's own critical insights into the nature of society. In his book, *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1938), Durkheim systematically describes what he believes are the appropriate scientific methods that should be applied to the study of society. This book is particularly important because it laid the early foundations for mainstream functionalist sociology.

Marx, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with the movement of society through various stages of social conflict. Marx's definitive statement on social conflict can be found in the short pamphlet *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). The first line of that famous document reads, "The history of all hiterto existing society is the history of class struggles," and this helps to explain his perspective on social movements as the mechanisms that bring social revolutions to fruition. For Marx, history has been propelled by revolutionary conflicts between economically differentiated classes of individuals. Thus, Marx was primarily concerned with macro level social, political and economic transformations that would lead to the ultimate realization of proletarian victory over the bourgeoisie. Marx's work has had a tremendous influence on contemporary North American social movement researchers; however, Marxist inspired theorizing did not make any substantial inroads into North American academic sociology until the late inter-war years as interest in functionalism declined.

Liberal-individualism was essentially a conceptual by-product of the European Enlightenment (an epochal social movement in its own right). The earliest political philosophers of the Enlightenment were concerned with a variety of topics such as the constitution of 'good' government, social order, natural law, science and reason. The economic and political writings of Adam Smith, a Scottish born economist who lived from 1723 to 1790, provides the best example of what is broadly known today as the theory of liberal-individualism. Smith himself believed that individual self-interest was the key to understanding economic and political organization. As a theory, liberal-individualism emphasizes the individual above all else and makes various claims about human nature and the motivating principle of self-interest. The most significant contribution to the sociology of social movements by liberal-individualist thinkers is Mancur Olson's book *Collective Action* in which he proposed a theory of social action that concretely located individual rationality at the center of social movements (Olson 1965; Olson 1982).

Durkheim and Functionalism: The Foundation of Collective Behavior Theory

In *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, Durkheim elaborated a biological analogy for the study of society. In Durkheim's terminology, society is similar to a living organism whereby the organism itself is made up of groups of interdependent cells that, together, constitute the various organs of the body. Each of these organs are, in turn, responsible for a specific biological function which contributes to the overall constitution of the organism as a whole. Society, for Durkheim, can be conceptualized in much the same way. Individuals in society are like cells within the body. The cells themselves depend on the smooth and uninterrupted functioning of other cells, and of the organs, which ensures the

continuing survival of the organism as a whole. According to Durkheim each individual cell carries out a specific function within the social body and he believed that the natural state of the social body is in a state of systemic equilibrium. It is from this biological metaphor that Durkheim gets the twin notions of healthy, versus pathological, forms of social organization. And, the unitary and solidifying concept of *social function* that characterizes much of the early sociological work on social movements as we shall see below.

While Durkheim himself did not carry out research specifically on social movements, his influence can be clearly detected in the earliest systematic sociological studies of collective behavior (a forerunner of what has come to be known today as social movements). Durkheim's most far reaching conceptual contributions to early social movements theory are the concepts of anomie, social regulation versus integration, social solidarity and the collective conscience. For Durkheim, anomie is said to exist within a given society when social norms have ceased to provide a moral framework within which individuals have clearly defined social roles. This state of collective normlessness can be caused by a variety of factors including an incomplete, or unsuccessful, transition from mechanical to organic social solidarity, external shocks such as natural disasters and economic crises, or a dysfunctional division of labor. For example, social pathology might result from an excessively skewed occupational structure where individuals are assigned to occupations based on a system of occupational inheritance (Durkheim 1951a). When the natural equilibrium of the occupational structure is transformed by the imposition of external political and/or other structural forces, the fabric of society itself is disturbed. In such a situation of social disequilibria, a state of anomie can result as individuals cease to

be drawn naturally into the various occupations that reflect their natural talents and proclivities (as well as the needs of society as a whole). As the occupational structure begins to show signs of anomic strain, so too do individuals who are embedded within society and the result is social pathology.

In one of Durkheim's most famous books, *Suicide* (1897), the link between structural strain and individual behavior is brought to the fore as he attempted to empirically demonstrate a causal relationship between rising levels of social strain and rising suicide rates among various social groups (Durkheim 1951b). In this classic study his general thesis is that individuals who are less integrated into society are more prone to take their own lives. Durkheim identified several key factors that influence the degree of social integration between individuals and society, including economic shocks, warfare, occupation, wealth and marital status. In a passage from *Suicide*, that has particular relevance to the emerging collective behavior tradition, Durkheim notes that, "no living being can be happy or even exist unless his needs are sufficiently proportioned to his means," (246). The unhappiness that results when needs and means are in disequilibrium leads Durkheim to hypothesize a strong causal relationship between individuals and the social structures that cross cut their lives. In this case however, Durkheim suggests that suicide is the sign of social pathology, while later collective behavior theorists focus on other types of pathological behaviors that are indicative of social strain such as riots and strikes.

For Durkheim, the degree of social regulation is one of two crucial axes that helps determine the health of any given society. The other axis is social integration and together these two dimensions help establish a conceptual framework for understanding the various

types of structural strain that can create pathological conditions for society and thus a rise in the suicide rate. For Durkheim a healthy society is one that is not characterized by either excessive quantities, or essentially lacking, a reasonable amount social integration and/or social regulation. The ideal, 'healthy,' society is one in which a moderate amount of both regulation and integration are present. In any extreme case where there is either too much, or too little, of these two forces, the feelings engendered in individuals are always destructive.

Collective Behavior Theory

Durkheim's notion of social equilibrium was extremely influential among early sociologists and was largely integrated into the theoretical foundations of functionalism. As a theoretical model, functionalism was most vividly represented by the norm-oriented work of Neil Smelser and Talcott Parsons whose writings attempted to link the work of earlier neo-liberal political philosophers to the field of sociology. Neil Smelser's 1963 book *The Theory of Collective Behavior* begins from the social equilibrium perspective and draws this perspective out into a full-blown theory of norm-oriented social movements. According to Smelser, shared values and norms form the basic foundations of social organization. He gives an example of the different collective behavior responses that might be precipitated by a black family moving into a white neighborhood (Smelser 1963). These include panic selling, violent outbursts and/or the emergence of a norm-oriented movement aimed at creating restrictive covenants designed to prevent additional blacks from moving into the neighborhood. The norm-oriented movement in this case is the result of two factors: *Structural strain* in the form of changes in the socioeconomic

mobility of blacks, and *precipitating factors* which in this case are the negative attitudes whites hold towards blacks. In turn, the development of a norm-oriented movement is also either facilitated, or impeded, by the actors perceptions of effective means to challenge the situation that has aroused them. This actual process of bringing about changes, such as the ability to pass a restrictive covenant, is also either facilitated, or impeded, by agencies of social control. For example, when the Civil Rights Act was passed by the US Congress in 1964, the state and its various enforcement agencies exerted negative pressure on norm-oriented movements that attempted to restrict the rights of blacks to buy homes in white neighborhoods. In this way, agents of social control can exert influence over the structural conduciveness for particular types of norm-oriented social movements. But Smelser introduced a twist into theories of social movements during the 1960s by distinguishing between collective behavior and social movements.

Collective behavior theory was an early forerunner of what was later to become known as the field of social movements. The emphasis of collective behaviorists was on involuntary, impulsive and spontaneous types of social organizations rather than on planned and purposive organizations formed in order to achieve specific goals. One of the earliest studies in collective behavior that drew from the same traditions as Durkheim's theoretical insights is Gustave LeBon's 1895 book *The Crowd*. In this book LeBon was very concerned with social impacts of mob-behavior, riots and other similar forms of disruptive, 'pathological' collective behavior. Herbert Blumer draws on the LeBon's work in a chapter of his classic 1969 book *Principles of Sociology*. Blumer also analytically distinguished between crowds, masses, the public and two variants of social movements

that he called *general* and *specific*. This oft-cited chapter is one of the first texts to attempt a systematic discussion of the various forms that social protest groups can take.

Blumer begins by defining the life-cycle of general social movements. These begin with what he calls *cultural drifts* which are based on changes that occur in the underlying values and norms of a society. According to Blumer, these changing social values cause a psychological change in individuals which, “provides the motivation for general social movements,” (Blumer 1969). Blumer also identifies specific social movements which represent a crystallization of the general change in social values into a specific goal oriented movement. It is in this way that the linkages between Blumer and earlier functionalist traditions and Durkheim’s notion of social equilibrium become most clear. According to Blumer, social movements themselves are born when the values of individuals gradually shift over a period of time. As these beliefs change, they begin to come into conflict with the old institutional rules that have governed social relations. As with Smelser, social movements often develop out of a series of collective behaviors such as restlessness, uneasiness, and a general sense of tense anxiety. According to Blumer, social movements pass through five distinct stages. First there is agitation followed by the development of a group *esprit de corps*. Next, group morale develops which is followed by the formation of a guiding ideology, and finally the development of specific operating tactics (Blumer, 1969). While the social movement “life-cycle” that Blumer describes appears somewhat mechanical, this is largely the result of the theoretical focus on social equilibrium inherited from Durkheim. As values change, they begin to come into conflict with social institutions and this conflict leads to institutional changes that then bring the social system back into equilibrium.

Another popular outgrowth of the functionalist perspective of social movements has been relative deprivation theory which was developed by Ted Gurr in the 1970s (Gurr 1970; Turner and Killian 1957). Relative deprivation theory claims that social movements are largely the result of rising expectations on the one hand and limited capabilities to actualize those expectations on the other. When, for example, the economy is doing well and incomes are on the rise, some racial groups may perceive themselves as being unfairly denied access to equal economic opportunities. As the theory goes, this will lead to increasing incidents of social protest as rising economic expectations are not matched with rising economic rewards.

Doug McAdam has characterized the early theories of social movements as 'classical' because they all share a similar causal model of social action (McAdam 1982). According to McAdam, the model that underlies the work of Blumer, Kornhauser, Smelser, Gurr and other functionalist theories of social movements, assumes that structural strain is what produces feelings of psychological anxiety among individuals. This state of anxiety is the motivating force behind social movements according to McAdam. Thus for Blumer, the motivation for specific social movements is ultimately rooted in underlying structural changes that then lead to general changes in social norms. It is this change in social norms that produce the psychological strain necessary to provoke people to social action. McAdam criticizes these 'classical' explanations for being overly mechanistic and not adequately accounting for the wide variety of external factors that can engender social movements. By relying on a model that privileges changing social norms as the underlying causal component of social movements, the classical models tend to assume a static picture of society which is characterized by the absence of conflict. Moreover, the

classical model implies that social movements are a mere derivative of psychological strain rather than rational and organized attempts to alter the conditions under which people live. McAdam suggests that conflict and change are integral parts of modern life and that social movements come about because of, “the ongoing interaction of organized contenders within a shifting politico-economic environment.”

Marx & Engels: The Structure of Social Conflict

In *The Communist Manifesto* Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels outline a materialist conception of history that borrows heavily from Georg Hegel’s philosophical work on the dialectical process of arriving at truth (Marx 1978). Marx’s most valuable sociological insight was a radical critique of the capitalist economy and its influence on social structures. Unlike Durkheim, Marx wrote directly on the subject of social movements, though he concentrated most of his work at the macro-political and structural/economic levels. While Marx did not attempt to analytically distinguish the constituent components of social movements, he did formulate a theory of social change that solidly located the labor movement at the forefront of social change. Marx related the rise of a modern labor movement to the structural conditions created by the modern capitalist economy, and he also attempted to situate social action within a historical framework of class conflict. While Marx had a tremendous influence on modern sociology, most sociologists reject his more radical writings on the irreversible and telological movement of modern society towards communism. However, even if Marx’s vision of our future was utopian, his basic contributions provided a much needed challenge to the apolitical, status-quo oriented theories of functionalism.

The basic components of Marx's theory that are relevant to the study of social movements include several related concepts. The first, and most important, is his underlying theory of the materialist conception of history, or historical materialism. Marx believed that social structures such as education, laws, government and the economy were primarily the products of the material conditions of society. By material conditions, Marx referred to the specific physical means by which human beings provide for their own life needs. These physical means of social reproduction include the production of food and shelter as well as less tangible institutions such as religion, language and other cultural products. Fundamentally, Marx believed that human beings are, by their very nature, productive creatures. The fact that we constantly produce leads Marx to the conclusion that at some point in history humans reached a stage where they produced more than they consumed. As individuals began to accumulate and stockpile surplus goods, or capital, the first signs of political struggle also began to emerge. According to Marx, in all modern societies a political division over property develops as some individuals accumulate more capital, through their own labor or the labor of others, than their neighbors do. This leads to a situation where different groups within society oppose one another over their control of surplus goods and capital. According to Marx's theory of economic determinism, the social structures that develop out of such an environment inevitably reflect the material realities of the culture. In this way, Marx accounts for historical progress through a variety of stages (primitive communism, feudalism, capitalism, modern communism, etc.) based on the material conditions underlying each stage of society.

Because the economy forms the base and social institutions are merely the superstructure, changes in the economy have the potential to radically alter social and

political relations. Marx, and other revolutionary activists of the middle 19th century, had anticipated that the slow, yet inevitable industrialization of Europe would ultimately lead to a full scale confrontation between the emerging proletariat and the bourgeoisie. With the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, and increasing unrest among disaffected workers throughout Europe, the existing political and social institutions came under increasing pressure from below. In France, by all accounts, the massive changes precipitated by French industrialization were leading to what appeared to be an inevitable confrontation between the two classes as Marx had predicted. Could the rising class tensions that were in evidence throughout the late 1840's and early 1850's possibly lead to the widely anticipated revolutionary fight between the workers and their capitalist oppressors? Marx himself had clearly hoped it would. Parisian workers organized in the streets during the February Revolution, which was largely a result of growing worker discontent directed at the constitutional monarchy of Louis Philippe. In 1848 Louis Philippe abdicated the throne and the Second French Republic was declared. Workers were buoyed by their victory and the provisional government attempted to appease them by recognizing the right to work and establishing a series of national workshops. This clearly disturbed the French bourgeoisie and they ultimately succeeded in later dismantling the workshops in an attempt to constrain the hard won constitutional right to work that the French proletariat had struggled for. This was not a popular move however, and workers reacted with a violent insurrection known as the June Days. This insurrection was quickly crushed after four days of fighting however; and Bonaparte was able to ensure the survival of the Second Republic for another few years.

Communists had clearly hoped that the French workers would be successful during the June Days, and in 1852 Marx wrote a series of newspaper articles entitled *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* which appeared in a German language newspaper in the United States (Marx 1963). In these articles Marx attempted to explain why the French revolution had failed, and he also speculated about the causes and implications of Bonaparte's *coup d'état* of 1851. Marx largely blamed the French peasantry for the failures of 1848. He compared small-holding peasants to sacks of potatoes and believed that they could not be a part of the revolutionary working class until they were fully removed from the "idiocy of rural life." Only once the peasantry was fully integrated into the urban proletariat could they become conscious of their own interests as a class and thus struggle on the same side of, instead of against, their urban comrades¹. For Marx, the ultimate social movement (the revolution) would occur once the workers realized their own true class interests. While the presence of rural peasants frustrated the French revolution, this happened, according to Marx, because the peasants had yet to become completely integrated into the emergent capitalist economy of France. For Marx, class consciousness was of paramount importance in the development of a working class revolution. But, without first becoming aware of the causes of their exploitation, workers would be largely helpless against the power of capitalists and the state; and it was to this task that Marx dedicated much of his life.

Marx's most impressive contribution to the study of social movements has been the illumination of this nexus between changing economic conditions and the resulting

¹ There is a lengthy debate on this topic of the rural French peasantry and their role in crushing the June insurrection. See Sewell (1989) Traugott (1989) and Gould (1994) for more detailed accounts of the role of various workers, peasants and the Mobile Guard.

mobilization of social groups negatively affected by these changes. As we shall see below, Marx's influence on the direction of social movements scholarship is even more dramatic in Latin America. The economy of most Latin American countries during the early to mid-20th century approximated the conditions of France during middle 19th century. Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Mexico (and other intermediate Latin American industrializers) were experiencing rapid urban industrialization while at the same time supporting large peasant populations. This familiar combination of circumstances led many Latin American scholars to ponder the revolutionary potential of the peasantry and the possibility of a *Bonapartist* solution to worker insurgency.

The fundamental challenge that Marx posed to social movements researchers was not fully realized until the mid-20th century among American sociologists however. Due to the dominance of functionalism, and its emphasis on social equilibrium over social conflict, sociologists tended to focus their research on collective behavior issues. Little attention was devoted to the study of class formation until the appearance of E.P. Thompson's critical book *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson 1963). This book is perhaps the best example of the impact that Marx has had on contemporary social movements research. The primary thrust of this book, as with other neo-Marxist writings about the formation of working-class identities, is on the relationship between class consciousness and socioeconomic position. Marx's prediction of the development of a "true" working class consciousness has been frustrated both by the historical record (the failure of a true working class revolution in Europe as well as American exceptionalism) and by ongoing social movements research. While Marx had predicted that class struggle would be the central locus of all modern social conflict, a variety of different, often

contradictory and seemingly incompatible, identities have instead developed. Examples of the types of contradictions that modern social movements evoked include blacks and other racial minorities being excluded from mainstream labor unions in the United States, anti-war movements drawing their support from students who were often confronted by members of organized labor unions and the development of various women's movements that have been fundamentally unable to agree on the sources of their oppression.

Marx's insights into the relationship between the economy and revolutions has helped make social movement researchers more sensitive to the underlying linkages between social change and social movements. Consider the Civil Rights movement as an example of this process. Marx brought our attention to the importance of how changes in the underlying structure of society could lead to changes in social relations, such as those we saw in the French revolution above. And, a Marxist inspired critique of the Civil Rights movement, such as the one offered by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977), begins by focusing our attention on the relationship between economic, social and political change. In Piven and Cloward's study, they found that black mobility was greatly enhanced by post-WWII industrialization in the North. In addition, the increasing mechanization of Southern agriculture led simultaneously to a decline in the need for black labor. Blacks were thus able to mobilize a broad based popular social movement, due in large part to their strengthened economic positions in the North, *vis a vis* the declining influence of agriculture in the South. Leaders in the Civil Rights movement such as Martin Luther King Junior, as well as institutions such as the NAACP, SCLC and SNCC actively registered voters in both the South and the North in order to force the Democratic party to act on behalf of the growing block of Northern black voters. As this neo-Marxist

reading of the Civil Rights movement suggests, underlying economic changes brought about increasing power and opportunities for resistance among blacks leading to the eventual reorganization of the Democratic party and the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s. As we can see from this example, the neo-Marxist perspective makes its biggest contribution to the study of social movements because it helps trace the reverberations that economic changes have on social structures.

The Liberal Tradition: Movements And Agency

The liberal tradition has given rise to a variety of individual-oriented theories of social movements and has its roots in the political and philosophical writers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and particularly Adam Smith, were all instrumental in laying the foundations for the modern fields of economics and political science, both of which heavily influence several branches of contemporary social movements research. The question posed by Mancur Olson in his 1967 book *The Logic of Collective Action*, and the later work of ‘methodological individualists’ such as Anthony Obershcall, came largely out of the concerns initially raised by the theorists of liberal-individualism. As the name suggests, they have tended to reorient the discussion of social movements towards an emphasis on the individual as the critical locus of collective action.

Mancur Olson posed a question in his 1967 book that concretely wedded the philosophical traditions of liberal-individualism to the study of social movements and ultimately gave birth to what is now generally known as resource mobilization theory (RM) (Olson 1965). Olson was primarily interested in analyzing collective action by

reference to the problematic relationship between individuals and groups. According to Olson, individuals are the basic unit of analysis. Individuals form and join various interest groups in which all of the members of the group share similar goals. Collective action is frustrated by what Olson calls the *free-rider* problem. Free-riders are those individuals who personally stand to gain if a given social movement succeeds. But because the benefit that free-riders stand to gain is *collective*, all members of the group will benefit regardless of whether or not they all equally participate in collective action. The question then becomes one of a given social movement organization overcoming the free-rider problem by applying various incentives to group members in order to secure their active participation. These incentives often include the application of negative sanctions such as a moral condemnation, negative stigma or outright ostracization from the group. As an example consider the various types of incentives that are often applied to a union member who is reluctant to join in with their colleagues on the picket lines. Striking/activist members will attempt to cajole, convince, threaten and use feelings of guilt in order to motivate a non-striking employee to action. Such a free-rider, who stands to benefit if the union wins, yet doesn't want to take the risks associated with direct participation in strike activity, is a considerable obstacle to collective action according to Olson.

Largely as a result of the great waves of social protest that erupted in the 1960s, social movements theorists have increasingly turned their attention to the collective action dilemma posed by Olson. During the late 1970s and 1980's, social movement theorists such as John McCarthy, Mayer Zald and others have attempted to integrate the lessons of an individual centered approach into a larger theoretical model that incorporates both the macro and micro levels of analysis (McAdam 1988; McAdam et al. 1996; Oberschall

1993; Zald 1988). This approach has generally been described as the resource mobilization perspective because its main focus is on the way movements utilize their various human, economic, cultural and political resources. The resource mobilization perspective is strongly related to the tenets liberal-individualism because it attempts to account for social movements by reference to individuals rational consideration of the various costs and benefits associated with movement participation. In its most general sense, the RM approach is fundamentally concerned with the strategic and tactical decisions that are made by social movement actors with respect to engendering the greatest amount of popular support for their movements. The everyday decisions that are made by various members, and especially the leaders, of social movements is the starting point for RM theorists. Moreover, the level of analysis is explicitly directed at the organizational level. For example, the decision of Martin Luther King Junior to march on Selma Alabama instead of the streets of Chicago entailed various choices that were made by way of reference to both tactical and strategic goals of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

As noted by Buechler, there are several assumptions that the RM perspective makes about social movements that warrant closer examination (Buechler 1993). The first major problem with RM theorists is the unproblematic assumption that grievances are of only secondary importance when compared to the processes that occur at the level of the organization, and the decisions that are made with respect to resource allocation. While RM theorists tend to treat grievances as being relatively constant background factors that do not bear significantly on the rise of specific social movement organizations, critics of this perspective suggest that grievances themselves can often be imbedded in the very

social fabric which gives rise to new protest movements and express ongoing social tensions. In the recent struggles in Chiapas Mexico, women are extremely active in many different facets of the indigenous struggle for land reform and human rights. While many Mexican women have latched onto the “Indian rights” action frame, a variety of recurring women’s issues frequently emerge on the regional and local agendas (Glusker 1998). Without a more sophisticated grasp of the enduring significance of gender issues across a variety of different social movements, the RM model has a difficult time accounting for the frustrating persistence of these types of grievances. And, as a result of the close attention that is paid to the organizational level, resource mobilization theorists have a tendency to overlook patterns at the micro and macro levels.

Other critiques of the RM approach have included the relative absence of a consideration of ideology as well as the under-theorization of the role of collective identities. Both of these criticisms have been leveled largely as a result of RMs emphasis on the rational actor model of collective behavior to the exclusion of a richer, more *socialized*, approach to protest movements. Since the RM model assumes that rational actors must be persuaded to participate in social movements by way of selective incentives, it often ignores the dynamics that occur within specific social movements. Radical direct action organizations in the United States such as Earth First and ActUp! tend to appeal to individuals within particular segments of society whose experiences resonate with the collective action frames that these social movement organizations engender (Gamson 1990; Gamson 1992; Snow et al. 1986). In this way then, social movement organizations work at framing protest issues in such a way as to appeal to the existing political and ideological orientations of potential sympathizers *before* those sympathizers formally

calculate the relative costs/benefits of movement participation. Thus ideological predispositions can radically influence an individual's attraction to, and support for, a given protest movement. Turner also found that rank and file protesters often tend to participate in collective action without any intimate knowledge of the specific goals of their organization. This finding thus casts further doubt on the rational calculating actor model advocated by economists (Turner 1995). The protesters that Turner interviewed tended to describe their motivations for participation in strike activities in terms of social solidarity. In at least some instances it appears that collective identities are more important determinants of individual protest than the rational calculation of costs and benefits. According to Turner, "(the workers) themselves *weren't so convinced they could win* but were inspired by the strength of purpose of particular individuals" (emphasis added 1995:248).

Framing and the Media

Both Neo-Marxist and RM theorists continue to study social movements from their respective theoretical positions; however, a variety of other approaches have developed as well. These include framing, the political opportunity approach, new social movements theory and the study of collective identity. The first two theories draw heavily from the theoretical concerns raised by early theorists such as Marx, Smith and Durkheim while new social movements is a fundamentally new theoretical approach based largely on new theoretical insights generated by European philosophers.

The framing approach to social movements has been most closely associated with the work of David Snow *et al*, William Gamson and Todd Gitlin (Gamson 1990; Gamson

1992; Gitlin 1980; Snow et al. 1986). The term “frames” is borrowed from Erving Goffman and refers to the interpretive schemes that individuals adopt in order to make sense of the world around them and to situate themselves within it (Goffman 1974). According to Snow, frames both impart meaning to events and, “function to organize experience and guide (collective and individual) action,” (1986). The framing perspective on social movements developed as a response to the under-theorization of grievances by RM and social/psychological theorists. While RM theorists tend to assume that grievances are relatively unimportant and in constant supply, social/psychological theorists account for grievances by reference to their psychological impacts on individuals. Neither of these perspectives adequately deal with the subtle and complex nuances of grievances, nor do they pay sufficient attention to the numerous problems are faced by social movement organizations that manipulate and frame grievances in order to mobilize movement participants.

In order to attract new participants, social movements must construct frames that closely resemble the frames of the individuals they are attempting to mobilize. This process is called *frame-alignment* and depending on how successful movement leaders are at bridging their own movement’s action frame with the collective action frames of sympathetic allies, they will be able to mobilize varying numbers of individuals. Potential activists do not blindly accept frames however. Individuals go through a complex process of frame assessment and evaluation based on a consideration of conflicting and alternative interpretations. In order to explore how ordinary folks construct their collective action frames, Gamson analyzed the conversations of randomly selected working class volunteers. Gamson examined three different collective action frames which he called;

injustice, agency and identity. With respect to injustice frames, Gamson found that working people do not simplistically accept the media's depiction of injustice frames without first processing them through their own interpretive and experiential frameworks. While the media do play an important role in providing material examples for the respondents, Gamson finds that media frames are rarely accepted at face value. While Gamson focuses on the influence that the media have on individuals' own collective action frames, Todd Gitlin's 1980 book, *The Whole World is Watching*, shifts the focus of media framing away from individuals and situates it within the larger US political/economic context.

As with other framing theorists, Gitlin also begins with Irving Goffman's definition of frames, but he focuses on the way that media frames impact social movements instead of the construction of individual frames. While Gamson challenges the notion that the media have a direct and unmediated influence on individual collective action frames, Gitlin contends that the mass media itself plays a critical role in shaping the public's perceptions, and opinions of specific social movements. Instead of focusing on the way that media images are received and processed by individuals², Gitlin begins with the assertion that the media have a direct and significant impact on the success, or failure, of modern social movements. The mass media were particularly important for the anti-war movements of the 1960s because media coverage helped to change broad-based public perceptions of the United States' objectives in Southeast Asia. This had the effect of attracting new members

² By focusing on the process that individuals' go through in reconciling their own collective action frames with those presented in the media, Gamson is primarily interested in developing a better understanding of how individuals become conscious of political issues. One assumption of this approach is that issue consciousness precedes mobilization, an assumption that is open to debate in contemporary social movements literature (see the critique of RM theory above).

into the anti-war effort as well as changing public discourse about US policy in Vietnam. The mass media exert influence over public opinion through a variety of different means. These include the creation of celebrities by singling out movement spokespeople for interviews, emphasizing extraordinary events over the commonplace, by selecting specific images of social movements that convey non-verbal meanings and by selectively choosing which stories are 'newsworthy.' For Gitlin, media frames are "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation (which are) composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters," (1980:6). According to Gitlin, these "little theories" can be broadly described as pluralistic, pro-status quo, ideologically loaded and essentially hegemonic.

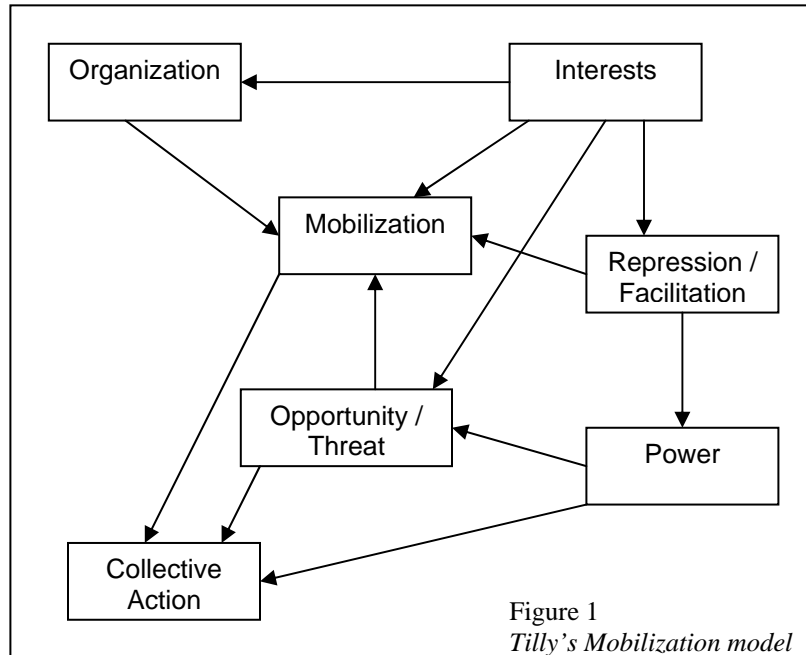
Gitlin's analysis of the media is informed by a consideration of political power and the subtle ways in which it operates in modern society. Gitlin draws from the theoretical traditions of Marxism for his analytical categories, more specifically Antonio Gramsci's writings on culture and hegemony from his *Prison Notebooks*. The problem for collective action according to Gramsci was one that involved overcoming the ruling classes monopoly control over ideological production systems such as educational, political, economic and cultural institutions. Although, according to Sydney Tarrow, Gramsci and other Marxist social theorists tend to overlook the importance of political systems in the formation of revolutionary working-class consciousness (1998:12). When the political sphere *is* considered by framing theorists, it is often viewed as either the result of the mode of production (Mills 1956), or else as one component among many that helps build political consciousness (Gamson 1992). With few exceptions, neither resource mobilization, nor social-psychological oriented theorists have done much better when

dealing with the question of political organization. However, the political opportunity approach, and particularly the work of Charles Tilly, is one of the most notable exceptions to this rule.

The Political Opportunity Approach

The *political opportunity approach* essentially bridges macro with micro levels of analysis in the study of social movements. Sydney Tarrow defines political opportunities and constraints as, “dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics,” (1998:19-20). Political opportunities, for Tarrow, are external resources for mobilizing groups. In other words, they are not created by social movements as such. Instead, political opportunities either benefit, or hinder, social movements by influencing the broader opportunities for successful collective action.

Charles Tilly formulated a pedagogically practical model of collective action in his 1978 book *From Mobilization to Revolution* which is reproduced in figure 1 below. The causal model that Tilly begins with is complex and encompasses several different variables that influence collective action. Tilly describes each causal variable and goes into greatest detail with a rare, but extremely important type of collective action known as revolutions. Tilly analytically defines revolutions as those situations which lead to, “the displacement of one set of power holders by another,” (1978:193). This extremely broad definition allows Tilly to setup a continuum of revolutionary outcomes which can include electoral revolutions where a new party comes to power within existing political institutions to radical political, cultural and social revolutions such as the great Russian, Chinese and Cuban revolutions of the 20th century.



Tilly's book is considered by many to be one of the finest exemplars of the RM approach; however, many of his insights show up in a variety of different theoretical works by neo-Marxists, to social-structuralists, framing theorists and even new social movements researchers. Tilly's most ubiquitous contribution to the study of social movements is the concept of *repertoires of contention*. This concept refers to the variety of different modes of protest that are available within any given social context during a specific historical period. Thus, factory workers during the industrial revolution engaged in work stoppages, wildcat strikes and taking or destroying machinery and equipment, while rural peasants in Latin America stage land takeovers and petition elected officials to enforce land redistribution laws. According to Tilly, the means of collective protest are always structured by the culture and history of protest in each society, the environment, the specific grievances of protesters, their varied goals and by the various political opportunities and/or constraints that shape daily experience.

Tilly's mobilization model of collective action provides a convenient starting point for the analysis of social movements. The first task consists of placing social movements into the boxes in the model and attempting to determine which variables are interacting with each other in order to get an applied picture of a given movement. This is no typical resource mobilization model however! Tilly incorporates a broad variety variables in addition to group resources which makes his model significantly more sophisticated and comprehensive than those suggested by McCarthy, Zald and Oberschall. Tilly does recognize one persistent problem with his model; that of social structure versus agency in accounting for collective action. He terms this problem *purposive* versus *causal* explanations of collective action (1978:228). When looking at the short-term rise and decline of specific instances of collective action, the mobilization model works quite well. But, when we take into account broader social-structural changes such as population factors (Goldstone 1991), changing modes of production (Marx 1978) and/or cultural/religious values (Weber 1996), the explanatory power of the model becomes more difficult to ascertain.

While model and theory building is an important aspect of sociology, it is important to keep it in perspective. The goal of any theory should be to help us to understand the general processes at work in a number of similar situations. Tilly's attempt to develop a causal model for social movements is a useful heuristic device, but it is only a general theoretical model, one that is certainly without universal applicability. The structural focus of Tilly's work is a common feature of the political opportunity approach, and it is important to keep in mind Tarrow's emphasis on political opportunities as being *external* to social movements. However, we can often gain an important perspective on the

significance of macro-level variables in explaining revolutionary outcomes by exploring the different ways that revolutions are facilitated (or impeded) by external political opportunities and constraints.

One of the classic macro-level comparative books on revolution is Theda Skocpol's, *States and Social Revolutions* which was published shortly after Tilly's. In this book she advanced the theory that social revolutions³ need to be understood by reference to three central analytical variables, (1) the organization of the state, (2) international and world-historical contexts, and (3) the role of structural factors in bringing about revolutions (as opposed to purposive actions or individual agency) (Skocpol 1994). While Skocpol tends to "over-structuralize" the macro-level factors that contribute to successful revolutions, her work is important because she brings our attention to the common patterns shared by the social revolutions she studied (the Russian, Chinese and Cuban revolutions). Skocpol and Goodwin claim that, in the case of contemporary revolutions, sultanistic or "neopatrimonial dictatorships...are more susceptible to revolutionary overthrow than are corporate military dictatorships," (Skocpol and Goodwin 1989). This is an important claim in the context of our discussion of Latin America, as the only two cases of successful social revolution (Nicaragua and Cuba) have indeed closely resembled sultanistic/neopatrimonial dictatorships. Most other countries in Latin America have tended to experience *coup d'états*, yet without the radical social transformations that have accompanied the Nicaraguan and Cuban versions of revolution. The political opportunity model can therefore be a useful tool to help us define the broad-scale parameters that

³ Skocpol defines social revolutions as, "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures, accompanied and in part accomplished through popular revolts from below," (1994:5).

characterize revolutionary movements, yet macro-level models may be less useful in the future as the processes of economic change and political globalization continue to unfold.

New Social Movements

The *new social movements* perspective largely developed because of the perceived inadequacies of neo-Marxist (structural) models of social movements that were popular in Europe during the 1960s. As the 1960s unfolded, it became increasingly clear that structural accounts of social movements, which assumed all individuals would develop a revolutionary working-class consciousness once they were made aware of the mechanisms of their oppression, were inadequate. In response to these inadequacies, European philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida and Piere Bourdieu began to develop alternative theoretical paradigms. Post-structuralism was the first strand of theory that emerged among these French intellectuals and this perspective gradually matured into what has come to known as postmodernism.

Postmodernists began with a radical critique of the assumptions of the Enlightenment. The age of Enlightenment has contributed significantly to the emergence of liberal, Durkheimian and Marxist perspectives on social movements in a number of important ways. First, Enlightenment philosophers, who were strongly influenced by the scientific revolution, rejected religious explanations of natural and social phenomena. In rejecting the traditional idea that all knowledge and events flowed from god, Enlightenment philosophers made the radical claim that phenomena such as disease, death and the movement of the heavens could be better explained by scientific means. The new epistemological paradigm that the Enlightenment precipitated, was the idea that scientific

knowledge itself was cumulative and progressive. According to Enlightenment philosophers, humans could master their physical and social environments by relying on the power and methods of scientific analysis. Not surprisingly, many of these early Enlightenment assumptions also subsequently found their way into early theories of social movements. For example, Marx based much of his argument about revolutions on the assumption that human society is progressively evolving through dialectical materialism. Each mode of production consequently paves the way for the next, better, mode of production. All this ultimately leads to the abolition of private property which, as Marx argued, was the cause of the problem all along. In Marx's Enlightenment oriented framework then, social revolutions are always supposed to be progressive and positive.

Postmodernists reject these positivistic and utopian assumptions of history and social struggle. And, during the mid-1980s, postmodern theory deeply influenced sociological thinking about social movements which gave rise to the new social movements approach (NSM). The primary theoretical proponents of NSM theory were initially Western-Europeans such as the Italian theorist Alberto Melucci and the German sociologist Klaus Offe (Melucci 1985; Offe 1985). As the NSM perspective has matured over the years, many American theorists have also begun adopting and adding to the NSM model as well (Buechler 1997; Darnovsky et al. 1995; Laraña et al. 1994). One of the most crucial theoretical insights provided by NSM theorists is the realization that *interests* can no longer be assumed as the mere byproduct of an individuals' relationship to the economy. Unlike the Marxist analytic framework, the NSM approach begins with the assumption that, "postindustrial societies no longer have an 'economic' basis; they produce by an increasing integration of economic, political and cultural structures," (Melucci 1985;

Offe 1985). Therefore, NSM theorists are fundamentally concerned about the transition from industrial to postindustrial societies and the impact that this has on the development of social movements. In societies that are characterized by postindustrial forms production (i.e. North America and Europe), the development of collective revolutionary identities becomes increasingly problematic.

The fundamental concern of NSM theorists then, is over the formation of collective identities because it is through identity that individuals become participants in social movements. Before a social movement can take shape, individuals must first join the movement, and they do this by identifying themselves with the causes represented by a particular movement. For example, an individual must first take on the *identity* of an environmentalist before they will join a social movement in support of the environment. In the Marxist model of social movements, collective identity is shaped on the factory floor. As workers toil side by side in the factories for subsistence wages, they become increasingly aware of their shared interests which leads to the development of a *proletarian* identity. Beginning in the 1960s however, a transition had taken place from an industrial to a postindustrial form of capitalism (Harvey 1989). Under modern capitalism production no longer takes place primarily in factories, so the conditions that would ordinarily encourage the development of a proletarian identity no longer exist.

One problematic assumption that underlies this assertion however; is that new social movements are only found in 'postindustrial' societies which leaves industrializing countries outside the scope of the NSM approach. Yet this is clearly not the case. Several different researchers have found evidence of NSM mobilization patterns in both newly industrializing, industrialized and postindustrial states (Alvarez et al. 1998; Escobar and

Alvarez 1992; McGuire 1989; Molyneux 1985). The key to understanding the ‘newness’ of new social movements then, is in identifying the unique characteristics of these movements. To this end, Gusfield, Laraña and Johnston identify eight features of NSMs that differentiate them from their earlier social movement counterparts:

- There is a tendency for the social base of new social movements to transcend class structure.
- The ideological characteristics of NSMs stand in sharp contrast to the working class movement and to the Marxist conception of ideology as a unifying and totalizing element for collective action.
- NSMs often involve the emergence of new or formerly weak dimensions of identity.
- The relation between the individual and the collective is blurred.
- NSMs often involve personal and intimate aspects of human life.
- The use of radical mobilization tactics of disruption and resistance that differ from those practiced by the working-class movement.
- The organization and proliferation of new social movement groups are related to the credibility crisis of the conventional channels for participation in Western democracies.
- NSM organizations tend to be segmented, diffuse and decentralized (Laraña et al. 1994).

These eight characteristics define new social movements, by reference to their differences in organization, tactics, ideological orientations and the identity of their constituents. Some examples of NSMs include the gay rights, environmental, women’s and ethnic identity movements in the post-60s era. If we use Laraña, Gussfield and Johnston’s definition of NSMs, then we can clearly identify their presence in Latin American countries, as well as the postindustrial states of North America and Western Europe.

Latin American Social Movements: Competing Theories of Social Protest

In this section, I provide an example of how the debates between the different theoretical perspectives on social movements have unfolded in Latin America. But first, in order to foreground the discussion of social movements, I begin by providing some historical background on the structure of Latin American social relations and political economy. Then, I consider several different social movements that developed out of this context and I consider the strengths and weaknesses inherent in each of the different

approaches to social movements that have been discussed. Ultimately, I argue that a synthetic approach to the study of social movements is preferable to rigidly sticking to only one theoretical perspective. Instead of seeing each theoretical tradition as mutually exclusive of the others, I argue that the political opportunity, RM, structural and NSM approaches are essentially compatible with one another. By combining elements from each different perspective, analysts should be able to get a much better sense of which factors are most relevant to a particular movement.

Latin America provides a good place to begin exploring the application of the NSM and Marxist approaches to the study of social movements. The emergence of the new social movements paradigm in particular, with its emphasis on identity based popular mobilizations, provides a stark contrast to the paradigms of resource mobilization, norm-oriented, political opportunities, state and class-centric approaches. The appearance of popular organizations across Europe devoted to stemming environmental degradation, promoting world peace, human rights and ethno-cultural autonomy inspired some theorists to abandon class-analysis all together. Much of the subsequent NSM research claimed that the concern over the distribution of material resources in society had largely given way to concerns over specifically non-material interests. Thus, it was believed by some that political and social struggles had moved into a new “post-class” phase (Engelhart 1997).

On the other side of the fence sit critics of the NSM perspective who questioned the newness of these movements (Plotke 1990). While other critics have suggested that the new found concern with identity represents an “anti-politics” in which critical and active engagement with repressive and conservative social institutions becomes absent in favor of a narcissistic concern with the personal (Kaufman 1990). Advocates of the NSM

perspective have embraced the approach and readily applied it to a wide range of social movements in Latin America. Clearly, there is no lack of contention on the application of the NSM perspective to Latin American social movements, but a closer examination of the Latin American context should help establish which theoretical perspectives are most applicable. In the next section then, I briefly sketch the historical background in Latin America that has given rise to a variety of contemporary social movements. Then, in the final section of the paper, I will turn to a discussion of how the NSM, political opportunity, RM and neo-Marxist approaches can be best applied to these cases.

The Historical Context of Latin American Social Movements:

The changes that have taken place in Latin America over the past fifty years have been extraordinary. With the end of World War II and the subsequent economic boom years, to the rash of military juntas in the 1970s and financial chaos in the 1980s and uncertainty of the 1990s, it has been a time of great transformations. The 1950s were a time of relative political calm in most of Latin America. Populism, as illustrated by the policies and practices of Peronism in Argentina, was the dominant model found in several major Latin American states and was characterized by an uneasy alliance between industrial unions, political elites and domestic capitalists. The 1950s also marked the publication of the findings of the UN Commission on Latin America (Prebisch 1950) which called for industrialization and the abandonment of the agricultural and primary commodity production policies that had been the dominant economic strategy pursued by generations of earlier Latin American colonial elites. The populist policies undertaken by many Latin American regimes during this era were largely made possible because of the

great economic gains made through early and continued industrialization efforts begun during World War II. The expansion of Latin America's economy into primary manufactured goods, textiles and other finished consumer goods expanded employment opportunities, radically increased industrial output and improved the standard of living for the majority of urban Latin Americans.

The era of populism was threatened by several factors including the rise of tensions between rural peasants working under the old *encomienda* system of production and landowners, increasing problems between populist coalition members, and by the economic shocks induced by radical currency devaluations, inflation and the reduction/elimination of price subsidies. In Argentina, populism was unceremoniously dumped when General Perón fled to Paraguay at the request of the military in 1955, and the final blow was delivered in 1962 when the military annulled the results of the election that had brought a Peronist candidate to victory.

Social tensions were further exacerbated by the increasing radicalism of urban workers and students throughout Latin America who began to call for radical social change. Many "post-populist" writers of the 1960s such as Régis Debray called for the radical socialist transformation of Latin America along the lines of the Cuban and Chinese peasant led revolutions (Debray 1965). Whereas more centrist writers, such as the Brazilian Hélio Jaguaribe, called for an emergent nationalism to combat the fragmentation of the interests of the working class and the national bourgeoisie (Jaguaribe 1965). Jaguaribe correctly foresaw the division of the interests of the national elites from those of the working and middle classes and he was chiefly concerned that Brazil, and by extension the rest of Latin America, would become a battleground between the global forces of

capitalism and communist (as represented by the involvement of the US and USSR). Writers such as Celso Furtado and Andre Gunder Frank also published essays boldly titled “Capitalist Underdevelopment or Socialist Revolution,” and *Development and Underdevelopment* which further contributed to the chaotic political environment by suggesting that the root cause of the social and economic problems of Latin America were caused by links to the capitalist economies of Europe the United States (Frank 1967; Furtado 1964).

Many analysts have characterized the resulting revolutionary situation in Latin America as similar to the environment that emerged in post-revolutionary France. Another similarity to the French case was the implementation of the *Bonapartist* solution that became widespread. As social unrest reached a boiling point, a string of right wing military *coup d’etats* occurred throughout Latin America. Military repression, political and economic retrenchment and the lost decade of development were the result as economic elites were forced to decide how to best balance the interests of the middle and increasingly radical working classes against those of the national elites. Student led protests reached their peak in states where there had not yet been military *juntas*, and in states where there had been a right wing change, social actors were left scrambling to survive in the aftermath of the military inspired repression.

Latin American economies did well during the 1970s with the exception of a few countries which prematurely experienced the debt crisis. Social movements were reconstituted to appear ‘non-threatening’ to the military rulers who were easily tempted to unleash death squads on suspected political subversives or groups that criticized or directly questioned the legitimacy of the ruling military authorities. Throughout Latin

America, Catholic and Protestant ecclesiastical base communities (CEBs) were formed and became very attractive alternative outlets for the expression of political dissent throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Also, in response to the Cuban revolution, the US backed Alliance for Progress was created in order to address some of the underlying social inequities that had inspired the Cuban revolution. Huge public works projects were begun and funded by attractive loan packages from the US and Europe with the belief that the resulting income transfers could prevent a repeat performance of the events that occurred in the Sierra Maestra. The United States also encouraged limited land reform policies in order to reduce the potentially revolutionary pressures that had been building up within the rural peasantry. And countries such as Colombia and Peru began extensive land redistribution programs designed to stem the tide of rural to urban migration.

If the 1970s are characterized as the lost decade of democracy then the 1980s were conversely known as the lost decade of development. Real economic growth rates became negative for the majority of Latin American countries as investment capital reversed direction and fled for the security of European and North American capital markets. In addition, structural problems were created when the economies of developing countries adopted World Bank and USAID development strategies that emphasized mono-export primary commodity production. This resulted in the accumulation of large surpluses of primary commodities on the world market. As these surpluses exerted downward pressure on commodity prices, a large balance of payments crisis developed throughout Latin America. In addition, the import substitution industrialization (ISI) models that had been adopted left many companies unable to sell their goods on the domestic market. This resulted in increased unemployment and a spiraling debt crisis that was only resolved

through the imposition of severe structural adjustment policies (SAPs) by the IMF as a precondition to receiving additional loan packages and debt refinancing .

On the political front, the 1980s marked the beginning of the democratic transition that provided new opportunities for previously repressed social actors to organize and articulate their economic, social and political demands. The SAPs that were introduced radically altered the long standing populist-inspired relationship between state owned enterprises and political parties because they forced the privatization and dismantling of many ISI policies and institutions. Due to the decline in public sector spending and employment that SAPs required, the 1980s also mark the entry of NGOs which arrived in record numbers to provide assistance where the state had left off. In addition to the increasing penetration of NGOs, multi and bilateral development agencies also began to pursue new developmental strategies in order to prevent a repeat of the 1980s debt crisis.

It was within this historical context that the debates over new social movements literature emerged in Latin America. While the theoretical heritage of the NSM perspective originated in Europe, it was well received among many Latin American scholars and activists because the NSM perspective fit nicely with the rise of NGO involvement in domestic politics, increasing democratization and the economic/social aftermath of the “lost decade of development.” Now we shall turn to a discussion of how the different theoretical approaches we have considered can be applied to the Latin American context.

Latin American Social Movements: Theoretical Applications

There is no question that the new social movements literature has indeed identified a qualitatively new phenomenon. Feminism, sexual orientation, ethnicity and environmentalism have all emerged as essentially “new” identity based foundations for popular mobilization. While some of the goals that these new political/social mobilizations represent are related to the material well-being of their participants, others are not. Indians are adopting new identities as environmentalists, claiming the right to cultural/ethnic autonomy and fighting for their own geographical spaces while urban gay/lesbian movements are attempting to win social legitimacy and the simple right to exist. The demands of many of these movements are not material *per se*, they are primarily demands for recognition, cultural autonomy and universal human rights by using new protest tactics and mobilization strategies. However, due to the extreme level of social stratification found in most of Latin America, many social movements continue to articulate demands that are fundamentally related to the creation and distribution of social resources while drawing on the organizational and financial resources that the NGOs from more developed nations provide.

When considering the emergence of social movements in Latin America, many of the features that differentiate NSMs from their Marxist counterparts have developed as a result of changes that have occurred at the structural level. On the political front, the macro-level reconfiguration of geo-politics, *i.e.* the demise of communism as a viable alternative to capitalist development, has played a significant role in the emergence of new social movement actors in Latin America. The elimination of the Sino-Soviet communist threat in the late 1980s decreased many of the political and social tensions underlying the

antagonisms between elites and the poor. Jaguaribe was essentially correct in the prediction he made thirty years earlier that there was a great danger Latin America would become the proxy battleground for the global struggle between capitalism and communism. This is indeed what happened as social activists and radicals largely went to the communist camp while the elites were framed as the antithesis to the dialectical progress of the peasantry and the working classes. Because the debates over social transformation in Latin America had been framed primarily in terms of socialist revolution during the 1960s, the national bourgeoisie was essentially backed into a corner. They had no choice but to either flee for safer pastures or fight against what they perceived as an immanent communist revolution. It should come as no surprise that state and military elites chose to stay and fight a *dirty* war, often with economic and military support from conservative and fervently anti-communist US policy makers.

This situation then poses an interesting and complex methodological dilemma for the study of Latin American social movements. It is nearly impossible to determine how many Latin American social movements were actually centered around the goal of starting revolutions as opposed to those that were concerned with issues of democracy, land-reform and poverty. While the Sendero Luminoso had historically claimed allegiance to Maoist ideology, this was largely the result of the leadership's need to obtain organizational resources from China. The peasants who were obviously being exploited by large landholders, felt a natural affinity with Maoist rhetoric, since the control of agricultural land was so clearly in their immediate interest. But, were the peasants committed Maoists? The broader political battle going on between global hegemony (the US and China/Russia) clearly provided the Peruvian peasants with an opportunity to air their grievances by

choosing one side or the other. And, as far as they were concerned, the Peruvian civilian and military governments had done little to improve their situation. It should come as no surprise then, that the peasants chose to support Sendero Luminoso. This dilemma illustrates a crucial problem for both NSM, RM and Marxist oriented theories of Latin American social movements. While it is clear that many contemporary social movements are engaging in NSM style tactics and behaviors, it is also critical that we understand the role that structural factors play in the development of social protest. It is primarily for this reason that I argue in favor of the synthetic approach that combines RM, class oriented, political opportunity and NSM perspectives.

In addition to the changes that have taken place at the geo-political level, the introduction of SAPs have also had a significant impact on the changes that have taken place in Latin America. Because the SAPs involved extensive rearrangement of domestic social spending priorities and the elimination of many of the financial subsidies provided to the poor, NGOs increasingly stepped into to fill the void. Subsequently, NGO strategies have been focused on identifying the problems of specific constituencies, building leadership skills among group members, helping to facilitate organizational skills and developing direct action tactics and strategies. With respect to NSM theory, there is an almost perfect analogy between the tactics and organizational strategies of European NSMs and their Latin American counterparts. This has led many researchers to conclude that Latin American social movements are characterized by new discursive social practices and forms of protest (Gianotten et al. 1985; MacRae 1992; Schneider 1992; Starn 1992). Ironically however, many of the skills, tactics and strategies employed by Latin American popular mobilizations have come directly from Europe and the United States via the

resources provided by NGOs (RM theory). Consider the example of the Solanda women's center in Ecuador (Rodriguez 1994). Feminism is one of a variety of distinctively European "new social movements" yet in this case a middle-class women's NGO from the capital came and helped organize the local women's center. The young barrio women refused to call themselves "feminists" while simultaneously struggling against patriarchal authoritarianism within their community and families. At the same time however, they also struggled against the state when bureaucrats attempted raise rents on their government-subsidized housing. It thus becomes unclear whether or not the Solanda activists were primarily motivated by material interests, or ideological "identity" issues.

The appearance of this middle-class NGO with the purpose of raising the consciousness of poor urban women suggests that there are indeed linkages between identity based NGOs from Europe and their Latin American constituents. Yet, yet when faced with declining state rental subsidies, immediate economic issues often move to the foreground instead of the more abstract gender based politics articulated by NGOs. The middle-class women's group from Europe helped train and organize the young barrio women, and the women readily incorporated the lessons that middle-class feminists provided, yet they also readily discarded irrelevant and threatening ideological elements. Yet structural factors have also clearly played a role in the formation of the Solanda movement. It is not coincidental that the debt crisis, combined with subsequent democratic openings in Latin America and the implementation of SAPs provided the context within which a barrio women's movement in Ecuador emerged. The arrival of NGOs and the new social movements discourse that they articulated was contingent upon many of these structural changes. Therefore, democratization, the subsequent increase in political

openness and the willingness of the Equadorian government to yield to the demands of collective actors all contributed to the opening of political opportunities for these forms of protest. This example clearly shows how the Solanda activists economic interests were coupled with their identities as women. Once the organizational resources provided by the NGOs were in place, the activists created a social movement that was successful, partially because of changes in opportunity structures within the Equadorian state.

The broader theoretical question that this example raises is whether any one theoretical perspective can alone, provide a sufficient explanation for the rise of specific social movements. I argue against relying on any one theoretical model because it seems logical to conclude that social movements generally require the confluence of several different factors. The example provided by the Solanda movement makes this point clear. Without the greater liberalization of the political regime in Ecuador, the opportunities for mobilization would have been severely restricted. In addition, the economic collapse of the state under the weight of international borrowing and the structural changes in the economy that were caused by the imposition of SAPs, brought the resources of European NGOs who had direct experience with NSM style tactics. But all these factors together would not have mattered, had the underlying economic causes of the women's grievances not been present. One important point is that in Latin America, there have been major changes in historical and structural conditions that have provided openings for a nascent feminist, and other similar movements, based on new forms of non-class identity.

While the larger historical and structural transformations that have taken place in Latin America have facilitated the development of new social movements, many of the issues the new movements address, remain stubbornly similar. With the exception of a

few movements that seek to fundamentally alter the basis of social relations, such as radical feminists and environmentalists, most organizations continue to struggle for greater economic participation and a larger share of social resources. Urban social movements in poor communities use the lessons they learn from NGOs to organize and protest the lack of potable drinking water and adequate sanitation services, while human rights organizations protest against the persistence of torture and violence. While the young barrio women of the Solanda Women's Center are fighting patriarchal oppression in society, they are also arguing about building higher quality schools so that their children can be better prepared to enter the capitalist labor market. Landless peasants still wage land takeovers against large land holders and the under/unemployed continue to seek alternatives to the low wage, part time occupations; however, these types of social action exist side by side with new social protest tactics and organizations.

The continuities that exist between old and new social movements are the same underlying economic concerns about the persistence of class rigidities, extreme social stratification, poverty, malnutrition, disease and rampant corruption by police and government repression. True democracy remains elusive in many Latin American countries and clientelism continues to play a prominent role at the national, regional and local political levels. Social movements continue to be co-opted by politicians through traditional means of promoting internal divisions and selectively offering concessions provided that further mobilization is restricted to state approved methods. Thus, Latin American social movements demonstrate an odd juxtaposition of new and old forms of social protest. What has changed so significantly among Latin American social movements is not so much the grievances of various collective actors, but the forms of

organization, tactics, strategies and resources available to those actors. In order to make sense of the causes and consequences of social movements then, I argue that the synthetic approach provides a better foundation than working within only model. It is vastly preferable to draw on the insights of new social movements, collective identity, resource mobilization, political opportunities/constraints and structural-economic theories as they are all relevant to the Latin American context, than to take only one perspective in isolation.

Conclusions

In the previous section, I provided a brief sketch of some of the various forces that were at work within the Latin American social movements landscape. By doing so, I intended to highlight the influences of several external factors that have led to the problematic assertion of the centrality of 'objective' class interests over other possible dimensions of collective action (religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). This example illustrates some of the methodological difficulties that contemporary social movements researchers face. One problem is the consistent tendency to reduce multiple and complex social phenomenon to the most basic of their constituent elements. This tendency is of course completely understandable considering that the very heart of sociological analysis is based on the assumption that social phenomenon are in some way reducible to general, and theoretically meaningful, sets of relational patterns. Researchers must therefore walk an analytical tightrope if they wish to benefit from the use of theoretical models. They must use multiple theories while simultaneously remaining aware that movements never fit exclusively within the domain of only one model.

While social theory is an important component of analysis, the most critical lesson that can be learned from the Latin American case is that we need to do a better job selecting and conceptualizing the specific theories that are used to drive research. If one theory forces the datum to conform to it, as opposed to fitting the theory to the observed datum, then these types of theories are generally less useful than those which can capture greater empirical and explanatory detail. In the case of social movements, I argue that the best approach to this dilemma is to attempt a synthesis of several of the different insights that have been outlined above. Of course, some theoretical models are more easily synthesized than others. The theory of functionalism for example, is largely incompatible with conflict theory because both perspectives make dialectically opposed claims about the nature of social interaction.

My treatment of Latin America provides an example of the approach I am advocating. I believe it is important to incorporate a variety of factors into the analysis so I attempted to account for the expanding/contracting political opportunities that were provided by changes in the external geo-political struggle between communism and capitalism. On one hand, the Cuban and Chinese peasant based revolutions were important ‘international demonstration events’ because they helped galvanize support for peasant based insurrection among leftist intellectuals and other revolutionary minded activists. On the other hand, changes in macro-economic policy had a significant socioeconomic impact and had far reaching effects on various social classes within the domestic economies which has negatively influenced the revolutionary potential of peasants. The framing of peasant insurgency by the media as well as the revolutionary “successes” in Nicaragua and Chile are also important factors. Additionally, the organizational and financial resources that

European NGOs provided to local social movement organizations has facilitated a variety of new repertoires of contention as well as more flexible modes of organization and new discourses about collective and human rights (Smith 1995).

As the author of the term *new social movements*, Melluci makes several important points about its problematic reception among social movements scholars. Melluci often expresses dismay at the tendency of analysts to reify the term (1996:5). Instead of debating about whether or not contemporary social movements are actually new, Melluci suggests that we need to systematically reevaluate the built in epistemological assumptions that such a question presupposes. For Melluci, social movements are not empirical categories. They are “analytical concepts” that need to be used to understand the different forms that collective action can take (1996:21). For example, Melluci criticizes the RM perspective which, “speaks of a ‘movement’ as a unity, to which one attributes goals, choices, interests (and) decisions,” (cited in Buchler 1997:261). He claims that the RM perspective fails to conceptualize social movements as specific *systems of action* in which individuals with diverse interests come together synchronically within the same *systemic field*. By reorienting the analysis away from the totalizing and reductivist tendencies in the RM case, Melluci claims that we can begin to get at the question of *why* collective action unfolds instead of being limited only to the question of *how* such action occurs.

The approach that I advocate in this conclusion is neither ground breaking nor radically new. The emphasis I place on synthesis is, in fact, evident among a broad variety of contemporary social movement scholars. For example, Cambridge University Press recently published an anthology of articles edited by McAdam, McCarthy and Zald in which the editors attempt to create ‘an emerging synthesis’ between the resource

mobilization, framing and political opportunity approaches (McAdam et al. 1996). On the other hand, a 1995 book edited by Darnovsky *et al* fuses RM and NSM theorists in an attempt to bridge the long standing divide between academics and social activists (Darnovsky et al. 1995). By taking up various synthetic approaches, social movements research can be partially freed from over-reliance on any single analytic approach. After all, if the goal of sociological inquiry is to develop a better, more complete, understanding of the persistent factors that pattern collective action, then researchers must be willing to draw from a diverse menu of analytical approaches. This is not to suggest that all analytical approaches are all equally applicable to every instance of collective action, quite the opposite is in fact the case. Clearly some forms of action that occur within specific social, historical and economic contexts such as the wave of Argentinian food riots of 1989 (Serulnikov 1994) are more amenable to one combination of analytical approaches than other forms of collective action (or the same type of food riots occurring under more stable structural/economic circumstances). What we need to keep in mind is that no single theoretical paradigm can ever hope to account for all the complexities of collective action.

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