

Social Movement Research in the United States: A European Perspective

Margit Mayer

In the effort to create a general, encompassing theory of social movements, a flurry of proposals for "synthesis" have recently been submitted. At first, suggestions were made to reintroduce social-psychological perspectives to the resource mobilization approach (Klandermans, 1984; Ferree/ Miller, 1985). Now, the integration of even the resource mobilization and classical perspectives is urged (McAdam/McCarthy/Zald, 1988; Rule, 1989). And in the international debate, a synthesis of European (structural) and American (resource mobilization) traditions is proposed. (Kriesi, 1988:364; Klandermans/Tarrow, 1988; Tarrow, 1991). These propositions, no doubt, reflect researchers' growing awareness of the particular limitations within each perspective to fully account for the emergence, dynamic, and characteristics of these movements. Thus, it is hoped that the systematic silences within the theory of resource mobilization (RM) on the role of norms, beliefs, or emotions might be filled by a return to some of the explanations offered within the collective behavior or mass society tradition. Or, in a somewhat parallel fashion, that the recent European new social movement theories, which link social movements to large-scale structural or cultural change, might nicely complement the American resource mobilization approach, as the latter focusses more exclusively on mobilization processes at the group and individual level.

However, such matchmaking will work only if the underlying premises, the basic assumptions about society and social change, which each theory holds, aren't contradictory or incompatible with each other. While this issue should be examined for each suggested linkage of different theories, this article questions particularly the last case, the synthesis between European structural and American resource mobilization paradigms.

It is frequently observed that resource mobilization theory explains the "how", whereas European social movement theory focusses on the "why" of mobilizations, so linking the two seems to promise a more complete account of the whole phenomenon: an analysis of mobilization processes linked to more encompassing theories of social and political change which seek to account for the development of crisis situations. The problem with such linkage consists in the fact that resource mobilization, while showing little regard for structural or cultural change, for studying the "why" of social movements, is not void of assumptions about social and political theory. Even though it is not a macro theory but consists of middle range concepts about mobilization potentials and movements, the meaning of these concepts is dependent on broader societal, political and cultural contexts which are not specified in the approach, but which can be distilled from its underlying socio-theoretical framework.

Resource mobilization's implicit assumptions about social structure and social change may not match the theories of social change embedded in the European theoretical approaches, vitiating a possible synthesis. Moreover, the research tools congruent with those assumptions may have been appropriate and useful only for the analysis of the American movements of the 60s and 70s, for which they were originally developed. The belief systems of many of these movements were extensions of the basic liberal concepts hegemonic in American public philosophy. Hence, their motivating force and ideology did not then seem to require explanation, whereas the methods of organization and mobilization did. However, the categories developed for the interpretation of methods of mobilization and organization may be inadequate for an analysis of movements before or after that period, movements which, for example, do not exhibit the characteristics of the professional "social movement organization" (SMO) or do not seem to be governed by strategic rationality.

Before any "synthesis" of theories can take place, attention must therefore be paid to the presuppositions and implications of each analytical approach. To this end, we start with the dominant American approaches, focussing particularly on resource mobilization, and seek to "deconstruct" the epistemologies and methods of U.S. research by relating them both to the particular character of social movements and to the unique political culture and national style of politics in the United States. By accounting for the historicity and national specificity of the assumptions and theoretical premises of the dominant American approaches to social movements, we explain why these American theories are so unique, different, and-- as yet-- incompatible with European approaches.

I. IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS IN THE CLASSICAL AND RM APPROACHES.

While the various macrosociological and cultural paradigms of European social movement research, which focus on the structural causes of social movements, their ideologies, or their relation to the culture of advanced capitalist society¹, have produced a definition of social movements limited basically to emancipatory social-change oriented actors, American authors have looked at a far larger variety of phenomena under the heading of "social movements." For them, the term includes social protest as well as collective behavior (such as voluntary associations and interest groups), crowds and militant action as well as inner-directed movements such as cults. While no definition can seriously embrace this wide range of phenomena, a filtering out of the tacit assumptions within the dominant American approaches may be undertaken. For this purpose, the classical and RM approaches² are analyzed along two analytical dimensions: 1. what assumptions are made about the origin or rise of social movements, i.e. why do societies generate this phenomenon, 2. in what type of political model are the movements located, i.e. what assumptions about the political constitution of society underlie the model.

Classical Approaches

1. In the classical-functionalist approaches, which were dominant in American social movement research until the early 70s, collective behavior was triggered by societal strain, hence disorganization, and mediated via social "uprootedness" and anomie (Smelser) or via frustration and fear (Gurr). According to Smelser, collective behavior is an irrational, exceptional and cognitively inadequate response to structural strains emerging from modernization, while for Kornhauser, collective behavior results from participants' disconnectedness from normal or traditional social relations. Underlying the notion of system strain is the (Parsonian) notion of societal integration, which seemed threatened either by revolutionary agitation or totalitarian movements.

Different variants of this approach³ all share the basic assumption that individual deprivations, breakdowns of the social order, and homogenizing ideologies are important preconditions for the emergence of social movements. These theories, while often politically preoccupied with preventing a rise of authoritarian (or otherwise alarming) mass movements, used the category "social movement" to encompass fascist movements as

well as communist ones, regressive ones as well as emancipatory ones. In each case, the defining feature of the "aberrant" behavior is that it occurs not only outside of the national consensus (for example of the Cold War), but also outside of established institutions, and that it does not follow prevailing social norms. The actors for this noninstitutional politics are the backward, marginal, alienated elements of society.

According to these theories, the life cycle of a social movement moves from spontaneous crowd action to the formation of publics and social movements. Structures associated with this process and their consequences receive little attention. If growth and expansion of the movement occurs, it is understood to be the result of crude processes of communication such as contagion, rumor, circular reaction and diffusion, for which homogenizing ideologies play an important role. Viewing this expressive type of resistance against modernization as irrational, classical theorists have primarily focussed on the micro-level of social psychological analysis: the origins of social movements are explained by reference to the same dynamics that account for individual participation in movement activities. Hence, answers to micro questions of individual participation *and* answers to macro questions of movement emergence are sought in the characteristic profile of the participants and the presumed psychological functions attendant to participation.

While not all theorists in this tradition deem collective behavior to be an irrational response of atomized individuals to change, they all share an emphasis on the psychological dimension of the reactions to breakdown, crude modes of communication, volatile goals and the transitory nature of social movements. The underlying assumption being that, if modernizing elites are not overwhelmed by the resistance and institutions are successfully defended, the resistance is bound to fail. Modernization will eventually provide the blessings of progress to all.

2. The political system, within which social movements are located in this model, is an approximation to the pluralist ideal of an open polity (see Smelser, Bell, or Parsons). Because this assumed pluralist model of politics allows for rational pursuit of interests on the basis of decentralized channels of political articulation and access, movements appear as superfluous and irrational. Political leaders are seen as receptive, the political system as permeable, and no group capable of blocking access to another. Hence, extra-institutional forms of action can only be a matter of marginal, deprived groups who lack the cognitive or temporal resources to use the access. As spontaneous, essentially expressive outbursts, social movements are not accorded, in the long run, the capacity to influence societal development or policy outcomes. Only parties, interest organizations and leadership strata have this capacity. Hence, the political processes and

actual political change do not need to enter the scope of social movement analysis.

Resource Mobilization Approach

1. As a reaction to the explanatory weaknesses of the classical tradition, which became transparent with the outbreak of the civil rights, anti-war, women's and black movements of the 60s, the so-called resource mobilization approach was developed. Those massive social movements stimulated a shift in theoretical assumptions and analytical emphases, which then were formalized in the theory of resource mobilization.⁴ The actors in those movements were largely from the middle classes and even where they were from the lower classes (as in the case of the welfare rights or farm workers movements), they hardly conformed to the image of anomic and deviant behavior held by the classical approaches: the dynamic of these movements could neither be explained by reference to deprivations nor to individual fear reactions. In order to arrive at meaningful explanations of (and supportive interventions into) the observable movements, resource mobilization theorists dismissed structural strain and grievances as explanatory variables for the emergence of social movements. Since the long-standing discontent of Blacks, women, Native Americans and other deprived minorities did not afford much analytical leverage for explaining the widespread mobilization of the 60s and early 70s, RM theory assumes that mobilizing grievances are ubiquitous and constant. Furthermore, RM authors thought that the role of ideology could be downplayed since the belief systems of most movements of the 60s and 70s were recognized as extensions of the basic liberal concepts which dominate American public discourse. Ideological orientations and motivations are taken for granted and do not play a role in the mobilization process. Instead of stressing the factors of objective tensions, deprivations, and belief systems, *variability of resources* became the key factor in explaining the emergence and development of insurgency. Aided by newly available or improved resources, deprived groups can be mobilized into collective political behavior. Empirical research by RM investigators found that social movements arise when necessary resources become available, when the political opportunity structure for collective action improves, and when facilities and leaders become available.

Given these conditions, social movements are not distinct and apart from political parties, lobbies and interest groups, as they were conceived in the classical approaches. Rather they are equally legitimate players in basically the same field. A fundamental continuity between institutionalized

and movement politics was thus posited: "In place of the old duality of extremist politics and pluralist politics, there is simply politics Rebellion, in this view, is simply politics by other means." (Gamson 1975: 138- 142) The political scientists coined the concept of "protest as a political resource" (Lipsky 1968), a resource which may be exchanged for "policy goods", thereby fundamentally transforming the relationship between protesters and their adversaries: it is now understood as a bargaining process between rational actors on both sides.

2. RM theory locates social movements in an elitist model of politics. While this is not necessarily how RM theorists would phrase it, the image that is over and over invoked is one of insiders vs. excluded groups, i.e. of elites vs. non-elites. In contrast to the classical approaches, the social groups excluded from the political process are disposed towards a rational form of interest politics: they form a collective means of interest realization not in spite of open political structures, but because of blocked political arenas. In this image of politics, both the regular channels for interest realization as well as the resources for political action are unevenly distributed. Hence, the resources for the deprived or excluded groups must come from outside their own sphere-either from reform-oriented factions of the elite or from intermediary agencies in the political environment. Therefore in this model movements correspond to neither the short-term riot nor totalitarian mass movements. Instead, the model assumes that, in the course of their careers, social movements generate the attributes of formal organization and centralization. They are defined as well-organized SMOs striving to maximize their power through skillful use of resources, balanced cost-benefit calculations, and assign a crucial role to the "organizer". According to theorists such as Gamson, McCarthy/Zald, Freeman, or Jenkins, social movements that are "successful" (i.e. gain formal acceptance and tangible benefits) possess the attributes of hierarchical formal organization, professional full-time organizers, and the capacity for effective mobilization of external support. These attributes are seen as responsible for movements' strategic effectiveness and combat readiness. Their view is that "Victories generally begin with policy successes and culminate in distributional goals" (Jenkins, 1985:21) and that social movements are about distributional interests interjected into the centers of economic and political power so that they may be implemented through state policy. Thus, this viewpoint privileges politically oriented types of movements seeking distributional gains over and against others that do not wish inclusion into the polity, for example movements which challenge or broaden the very definition of what is "political". These tacit assumptions about the relationship between movement and polity narrow the range of movements to one visible type, making all others invisible.

On the other hand, these same assumptions also produce too broad and vague a definition of social movements because the model embraces all groups that are in some way "excluded". Since the approach is indifferent to the type of insurgency, the kind of practice, the substance of ideology, and the idea of society envisioned by the movements, it lumps social movements together with routine and sporadic collective action as well as with interest group organizations. Its basic image leads it to focus on excluded groups organizing and pooling resources in response to increased opportunities. Since such collective action is studied without specification of structure and its relation to agency, the (whole) population is conceived of as an aggregate and as such a target of mobilization efforts. Since this diffuse population of potential followers does not need to have any autonomous reasons for overcoming their inertia, they have to be constantly persuaded, directed, stimulated, and manipulated by the movement leaders. In fact, different SMOs are seen as competing for their allegiance, support, and membership: all of them apply "frame bridging", "frame extension", and "belief amplification" in their competitive efforts to attract "otherwise disinterested individuals." (Snow et al., 1986:18)

Over time, the resource mobilization approach began to split into two competing perspectives, one intensifying the organizational focus (the professional SMO which transforms existing discontents and demands into goal-oriented social movements)⁵, the other developing a political process emphasis, within which, in addition, the collective interpretation of the situation plays a more significant role.⁶

The first (RM I) conceives of the social movement sector in free competition with other sectors of society on an open market place of groups and ideas. This market is without biased structural rigidities. In it, SMOs compete with non-movement organizations for the allegiance and resources of the population, they calculate and execute actions that give themselves notoriety and expand their membership in the same way a corporation would engage in advertising campaigns to increase sales and profits. (McCarthy/Zald 1977:1229) Not surprisingly, their actors appear as "rational corporate bureaucrats devoid of passion and meaning". (Snow 1988: 604)

The second (RM II) is more concerned with the structure of political opportunities and with the degree of organization within the deprived social groups; it argues from the presupposition of endogenous networks of interaction. Based on empirical work particularly about the early civil rights movement, authors committed to this position argue that two sets of macro- structural factors facilitate (or hinder) the generation of social insurgency: the level of organization within an aggrieved population, and the political

realities confronting members and challengers. (Cf. McAdam, 1982, 1983; Tarrow, 1983)

II. THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORIES AND PRACTICE

Further variations of the resource mobilization approach, which seek to balance some of the weaknesses and problems of the paradigm, have been developed in recent years. These have attempted in particular to make up for two lacunae: (1) the neglected process of grievance *interpretation*, for which the emphasis on instrumental, purposive rationality had left no space, and (2) the lack of concern for the role of the political system. Concerning the first, Snow et al. (1986) and Snow/Benford (1988) expanded the RM approach to include interpretive resources, meanings, and other ideational elements, and found that occurrence, intensity, and duration of protest cycles are also due to the presence or absence of a potent innovative master frame. Concerning the second limitation which became more and more apparent as the theory developed, political scientists began to expand the RM approach to include Eisinger's concept of political opportunity structure. Tarrow (1988), for example, interprets the unfolding of a process of policy innovation in the political system, which addresses the protesters' stated demands, as evidence for successful goal achievement of a social movement, and uses it as the basis for detecting waves of policy innovation coinciding with waves of social protest. (Cf. Tarrow, 1989)

In spite of these "expansions" or qualifications, RM theory remained, however, committed to the basic assumptions of the approach⁷ i.e.

- the emergence and development of social movements are primarily explained in terms of variability in resources and in the political opportunity structure,
- underlying this view is an implicit elitist model of politics,
- movements are always measured by the criteria of strategic effectiveness.

These key assumptions reflect both the practice of American social movements generally and those of the 60s in particular, when the failure of liberal politics provided the trigger for a wave of protest movements that could hardly be read as irrational outbursts of deviant or marginal citizens. The emphasis which the RM paradigm places on rationality, resources, formal organization, and combativeness (including non- conventional and militant methods), aptly captures what appeared as significant and new about these movements and highlights some of the

qualities which traditional approaches did not account for, i.e. movements that engage in rational behavior, guided and structured by movement organizations that play a crucial role in translating grievances into collective action, and which include contingent "opportunity structures" that aid or prevent mobilization. This image of what a social movement is could not be more opposite to that of the classical approaches where collective action was seen as something occurring outside of established institutions and not following prevailing social norms. In the face of the experience with the 60s movements, which demanded the application of the basic liberal concepts to themselves (up to then excluded groups), the propositions of the classical approaches made no sense at all. The latter may have made sense with regard to movements that supported Stalinism or Naziism, but could not explain movements which "merely" demanded a fuller realization of democracy, even if by means that seemed unconventional. Thus, the classical approaches were replaced by others, in which social movements operate more on the level of pressure group politics associated with the utilitarian liberalism of middle class American democracy. While invoking the promises of liberal democracy, these movements also challenged its then current embodiment, the Cold-War national consensus, and envisioned instead a consensus in a hoped for future that would include the demands of the social movements.

Nonetheless, important continuities remain between these two styles of American movement research. It is striking that both the classical approaches as well as RM operate with a concept of society that is either openly pluralistic or conceived as a relatively static relationship between elites and non-elites: in neither case is society seen as structured by class relations or the logics of production and reproduction. These conceptions of social movements are accounted for not only by the specific historical movements their researchers happened to be studying (i.e. very frequently "non-displacement" movements, which neither challenge the monopoly of force of the state nor the hegemonic cultural code), but also by the methodological individualism with which they view society: society seen not as forms of social organization possessed of classes and ownership relations, but as a static arrangement of (relatively homogeneous) elites and (undifferentiated) non-elites, of political insiders vs. excluded groups. The objective of the excluded groups is to "strive to scramble aboard" (Jenkins, 1985:227), making the object of study the conditions under which this climbing aboard will succeed. In the pluralist case, where permeability and openness of the social and political structures are presumed, the movement's objective succeeds if and when the groups are efficiently organized (Gamson, 1975); in the more radical "social-democratic" case, where the concept of the state exhibits an institutional bias against

rebellious groups (i.e., where an immanent restrictiveness of the political system is assumed), it succeeds only in exceptional instances, when realignments and political turmoil force the state to become a "facilitative agency for the institutionalization of genuine social reforms." (Jenkins, 1985:228) The ultimate goal of the movement is assumed to be tangible gains for movement participants, not reform or change of society, nor rejection of the hegemonic definition of growth and efficacy, nor alternative cultural codes.

While this orientation, in fact, captures a prevailing type of social movement practice in the USA, it excludes others. For example, some contemporary movements which entertain visions of changing society do not fit the model since they do not have (or only secondarily have) distributional goals. The experience and success of groups such as direct action oriented anti-nuke groups (e.g. Livermore Action or Clamshell Alliance) or the more submerged activity of countless women's, peace, or ecological groups, apparently defy the typical pattern of the "dominant" SMO: they are decentralized and loose, consist of affinity groups and clusters, occupy construction sites and risk jail, and have belief systems and ideologies that play an important role in the mobilization process: none of these fit the image projected in the RM approach.⁸ In fact, according to the RM paradigm, such movements theoretically should not experience the resonance they do insofar as RM has "demonstrated" and "proven" that a clear internal division of labor, efficient decision making, centralized resource management, and low-risk activities guarantee both significance and success of the movement. (Cf. Gamson, 1975:89-110)

However, since such movements appear to be "invisible" in the American public sphere, this failure to recognize them does not seem to be much of a problem: local movements especially, which do not achieve media recognition, tend to be confined in space and time, and never acquire the successful social and/or lobby influence that otherwise capture the attention of the researchers. In other cases, less marginal movement behavior, not so easily overlooked, but yet not wholly conforming to the "typical" pattern, has been "fitted" (if somewhat forcefully) into the conceptual apparatus of RM. The riots of the black ghetto populations are a case in point. To avoid falling back into the framework of the older collective behavior approaches, models were postulated that interpreted even this spontaneous rebellious behavior as "rational politics by other means". By replacing SMOs with "ecological units" and labelling the spontaneous riots as "situational assembling" (Snyder/Kelly, 1979; McPhail/Miller, 1973) the researchers invented a new casuistry that allowed them to remain within the framework of the RM approach.

The tenets gained from the study of this dominant type of American social movement, those about formal organization and the role of the "organizers" especially,⁹ tend to exclude from view other, newer phenomena. This exclusion becomes more obvious when the American situation is contrasted to that of Europe, where the "novelty" of the social movements of the 70s and 80s has been a primary object of interest. In the ecology, peace, or women's movements that exploded in western Europe during the 70s and 80s, the working class is no longer the actor. Neither are legal/political equality or economic demands central to their concerns. And their organizational forms are, so it appeared to many observers, more informal and egalitarian than those in earlier movements.¹⁰ This European scholarship sensitizes us to deeper, underlying shifts in the concept of "the political" that these new social movements seem to both articulate and reflect: They erode the classical boundaries of political discourse¹¹, and create a new political arena between the state and civil society¹². Though clearly not replacing the working class movement that was seen as *the* historical actor in the Western European case, the ecology, feminist, peace, gay and lesbian, antinuclear etc. movements have also appeared in the Eighties in the United States. It is doubtful that their characteristics, dynamics and significance can be grasped within the perspective provided by either one of the dominant American approaches.

A further blind spot in both American approaches is a failure to study the relationship between movements and the state. In both the permeable and elitist version of the state this relationship is more or less taken for granted. Hence, the state's functions, reactions, and the many possible relations between social movements and the state remain outside the perceptual horizon of the research. Only recently has Tarrow demanded that state reactions be included for consideration, but even in his proposal such relations remain limited only to positive "elite responses", i.e. those state innovative responses which constitute policy success for the movements. For Tarrow, the effects of control and of repressive state force on the movements remain outside of the picture, even though it is obvious that they play a crucial role for movement development.¹³ Furthermore, Tarrow's onesidedness is misleading, for the history of social conflicts shows that policy success is never a matter of direct adoption of movement goals, without compromise. But little research in the framework of American social movement theory considers the institutionalization of movement demands and the effects of these processes of institutionalization both on the movements and the political system as a whole.¹⁴

Within the American research paradigms, questions about the effects of innovation and state restructuring due to the introduction of new bargaining structures (e.g. New Deal, Civil Rights legislation, or responses to participatory

demands) are not asked. RM theory does not consider such questions as whether new channels of access are stabilizing or destabilizing for the movements, whether the role of parties is weakened by them, or whether new modes of conflict management emerge due to the incorporation of movement representations. These questions are relevant for the study of social movements because they address the roles that social movements themselves play in the dynamics of the crisis of societal forms of reproduction.

While these examples point to structural blind spots and deficits in the dominant American approaches, it is the case that these paradigms also correspond to a uniquely American style of politics that has shaped social movements throughout American history. Even its experience of its latest movements in the 80s continues to confirm the peculiarly American characteristics of social movement practice. On the one hand, direct action movements (such as anti-nuclear weapons) are transformed into institutional politics (such as the Freeze), and SMOs seek to garner the support of "middle America", whether the movement be Freeze or Moral Majority. On the other hand, the all-pervasive American entrepreneurial habit and practice pervades not only voluntary associations and interest groups, but also social movements. Commodification of everyday life takes place at a speed and scope far greater than the decommodifying effects of social movements can achieve. Even the so-called "post-acquisitive" and "non- negotiable" values expressed in some contemporary movements turn out to be quite marketable and useful for capital innovation. For instance, movements like those that focus on nuclear energy policy, which started out as radical critiques of state policies, have come to embrace the solar or soft technology energy markets.

These tendencies in the American social movement sector point us in the direction we must look to explain why the resource mobilization approach has enjoyed such a splendid and fashionable career in recent American social movement research. Given the pervasiveness of these trends, the dominance of the resource mobilization approach among the various interpretations makes sense because it locates the "business" of social movement "industries" in the acquisition of resources to the neglect of movement goals and the motives of its participants.

III. UNIQUE AMERICAN POLITICAL STYLES AND CULTURE

Why is it that RM approaches have enjoyed such a successful career in American social movement research? Why have they become so influential and pervasive in the fields of sociology, history, and political science?

A movement-internal answer to these questions would start from the observation that theories arise at certain historical conjunctures and thus represent a theoretical rationalization of historically concrete contradictions and of their corresponding praxis. In other words, RM emerged in an effort to analyse the movements of the 60s, and as a consequence reflects their conditions of emergence, dynamic of development, structure of organization, etc., in contrast to the classical approaches which were intended to explain the mass movements of the 20s and 30s, which were wholly different types of movements.

This type of explanation allows us to derive some of the internal differences between the various strands of theory from the various movements that served as basis for the respective analysis of each. The following examples illustrate three varieties of conclusions that have been drawn from factors internal to the specific movements studied:

1. Those analyzing the early civil rights movement emphasized endogenous networks and internal resources, over and against the role of external resources. Thus, Morris (1984) could demonstrate that indigenous Black leaders and resources generated the civil rights movement and independently forced the Southern power structure to accede to their demands. In the analysis of the major campaigns, he as well as McAdam (1982; 1988) found a complex network of "local movement centers" rather than the handful of charismatic leaders celebrated in standard histories.
2. Those looking at non-displacement movements, which do not put forth a radical challenge to the system, emphasized the SMOs and their task of mobilizing resources. For example, Gamson's study of 53 challengers in American history (all of which were formally organized groups) has been challenged by Goldstone (1980), who reanalyzed Gamson's data and found that organizational and strategic considerations were irrelevant once controls were introduced for the goals and the political context. Hence, nondisplacement movements were found to consistently succeed in the American polity. Many of the 60s and 70s movements, which served as the basis for RM analysis (McCarthy/Zald, 1973; 1977; Jenkins, 1977; West, 1981), also seemed to provide evidence for the crucial role of the professional SMO, external sponsorship, and institutional resources. Within the welfare rights, farm workers, and older wing of the women's movement, these trends were increasingly observable, just as they were in the environmental, consumer rights, and public interest "movements" of the 1970s.

3. But those who used the *early* welfare rights movement (Piven/ Cloward, 1977) or the community work of the New Left (Breines, 1982) as the subjects of their study, arrived at an opposite conclusion about the role of formal organizations and professional organizers, leading them to argue that formalized organizations *divert* energies from mass defiance.

Such explanations based on the internal structure of specific movements cannot, however, account for why other countries, which also witnessed high mobilization in the 60s and parallel developments in the 70s, did not elicit a theoretical paradigm like that of RM. Another explanation is needed to account for the degree to which the studied movements and their developmental patterns reflect American society and its political culture. This explanation relates the implicit premises and assumptions inherent in the dominant American approaches to the particular social and political conditions of the United States.

The assumptions guiding collective behavior and RM theories and the incompatibility between American and European research are primarily attributable to some particular features of American politics:

1. Its relatively open, fluid and decentralized political system that has typically prevented an antagonistic polarization between movements and the political establishment.
2. The reintegration, again and again, of insurgent, innovative reform movements in the course of American history into the dominant American ideology, utilitarian liberalism, emphasizing instrumental rationality and pragmatic problem solving that prevent the formation of groups who would be unalterably opposed to the system itself.

This typical style of politics has a material foundation. The conditions of the historical emergence of American society allowed for far-reaching expressions of egalitarian power and political participation, on whose basis a rich civil society, shaped by communitarian practice and a libertarian political culture, could flourish. A precondition for the development of this society of independent citizens and their rich public-communal sphere was the restriction of the civil rights of Blacks, Native Americans, newer immigrants and women, and the appropriation of their labor. In spite of these exclusions from full civic participation, the salience of this far-reaching "self-management" and local democracy exerted a powerful influence on the cultural dispositions and on the organization of the American political system. Not only were political institutions designed to be weak and fragmented at their very conception, but the tradition of disobedience to

established authority was raised to the level of a moral duty. Civil disobedience, supported by the founding myths and liberal theories of dissent, is legitimated as part of the traditions of anti-statist and local self-government. These traditions encourage and taint radical movements with libertarian hues, and have led throughout American history to the legitimation of uprisings against authority. At the same time, the strength of liberalism and individualism encouraged types of social movements favoring populist models of independent, self-organized projects.

Wave after wave of new ethnic immigrants exercising their right to social struggles and pressure group politics were absorbed into the open and increasingly fragmented political system. The flexibility of the party system on the one hand, and the heterogeneity of living conditions on the other, encouraged the appearance and intervention of a multitude of special movements and interest groups—from voluntary associations as described by Tocqueville to culturally/morally oriented protest movements—all of which complemented the formal political party system in their unconventional forms of expression and in their self-limitation to specific innovations (cf. Lipset 1977).

The open and fragmented structure of the American political system further facilitated responses, even if selective, to publicized grievances by granting concessions or inclusion of movement representatives, and thus provide an inviting environment for the emergence of social movements. While this system facilitates the cooptation of protest movements into the system by flexibly allowing both material and psychic concessions to newer claimants, not all protest movements have been coopted. Those movements, like the Communist Party or other militant left groups such as the Weathermen or the Black Panthers that refused to be coopted, were instead systematically harassed.

IV. ACCOUNTING FOR THE CENTRAL ASSUMPTIONS IN THE AMERICAN THEORIES

The specific social and political features of the United States allow us to draw out how the central assumptions in the dominant American theories are shaped by both these particular conditions and by the distinctive movement patterns that they have encouraged. There are at least five important ways, in which a direct correspondence between the theoretical assumptions and the particular historical reality of social movements in the U.S. can be seen. Viewed in this way, the apparatus of categories developed for the U.S. social movement experience not only becomes transparent in

its limitations but, more positively, contributes to our understanding of the pattern of social movement practice in the United States.

1. American conditions are receptive to the permanent *coexistence*, side by side, of social movements and interest groups with the established institutions of the political system. Because of this, analysts have concluded that there is a continuous existence of mobilization potentials, which, as such, do not require further explanation (RM). Conversely, the approximation of the ideal of the open polity could be taken as evidence for placing social movements *outside of* this polity, providing a reason to marginalize them academically and argue their repression politically (collective behavior theories). In any case, the concept of "social movement" does not refer to *the* social movement (the working class movement, as in the European contexts), but comprises a multitude of social protest and reform movements, always coexisting with parties and interest groups without challenging any institution's claim to represent political interests. This all-embracing concept of social movements seems, therefore, consistent with the dynamic of U.S. history. It does not imply that class relations were marginally important for social conflict, but it overdetermines demographic, ethnic, political, religious and sociocultural variables in ways that shape a unique social movement pattern.

2. The United States produced a pervasive pattern of self-limiting movements which focus on single issues, achievable success, and individual self-reform. Movements aiming to become part of the American mainstream by demanding equal opportunities or integration into established institutions tend to flourish as do those which struggle for (partial) autonomization of various subcultures. Disaggregated and issue-specific movements that refrain from totalizing their demands flourish all over this country, but movements demanding radical societal change have always remained relatively marginal. Such radical or socialist currents were once even more marginalized by their omission in social movement research. Questions pertaining to their development and dynamic hardly appear in recent American social movement research. Much the same applies to contemporary new social movements which, to the extent that they do not conform to the canon and hence do not visibly participate in the pluralist process, are easily overlooked, or cannot even be incorporated into the categories of RM.

3. The dominant political rhetoric of American society nourishes high-flying democratic expectations and thus provides encouragement to ever more social groups to disrupt the precarious balance between the "founding myths" (i.e. the ideals of the formative period) and the institutional realities of American politics. This tension in American liberalism, according to Huntington (1981), produces "naturally" regular periods of

"creedal passion". As a consequence, the social movements articulating these tensions have not needed to define themselves *outside* of the hegemonic American discourse; in fact, Jeffersonian democracy, communitarian self-reliance and decentralized, participatory forms of politics are constitutive parts of "Americanism" itself. Even movements such as those of the students (cf. the Port Huron Statement of SDS) or the anti-nuclear direct action movement (cf. Livermore Action Group) could claim these values.

4. The heterogeneous and segmented societal pattern underlying America's high degree of civic voluntarism, self-reliant public participation and self-regulative communitarianism, implies at the same time a pronounced sectoral unevenness and sharp economic disparities. Under-developed welfare state policies (underdeveloped in comparison with Western Europe) have not mitigated these disparities. A very incomplete representation of the working class exacerbates the unevenness. As a consequence, social movements in the U.S. up to the present tend not only to raise the particular issues their members feel aggrieved about, but they also implicitly raise, or are quickly forced to confront, an unfinished class, race and ethnic agenda. "New", "post-material" or "life-world" oriented movements emerge in alliance with "traditionally" discriminated class and racial groups. This mixture of grievances and of conflict levels makes it difficult to speak of and to detect so-called new social movements. So long as problems of economic inequality remain so uniquely unresolved because relevant parts of the American society remain excluded from its established class compromises, distributive demands will be primary. The prognosis for new social movements that challenge prevailing concepts of industrial growth and progress and that concern themselves with environmental or identity problems, are unlikely to become decisive in the U.S.

5. The all-pervasive businesslike entrepreneurial ideology and practice guide not only interest groups, voluntary associations, and the large professional movement organizations, which continue to gain the bulk of publicity, especially those with a religious and socially-conservative style. The entrepreneurial spirit also characterizes countercultural social movements. Almost all American movements have been quick to adopt strategies of sales and advertising firms and instrumental ways of fundraising, and have become adept in using the mass media, especially TV, to broadcast their messages. This utilitarian attitude is mirrored and reproduced in the construction of theory. Rather than exploring why movements in the U.S. are more entrepreneurial, more competitive, and less "ideological" than elsewhere, American movement research reflects uncritically these attributes in the kinds of questions asked, the problems perceived, and the

language and methods used. Thus, again and again it (re)confirms and (re)verifies its assumptions in countless empirical projects,

- it is the "business" of social movement industries to acquire and increase resources,
- insurgencies that restrict their goals to single issues and leave the existing structure of authority uncontested, are more likely to secure tangible gains (Gamson 1975: 38-55),
- the mobilization potential is weak, if the values and beliefs a movement seeks to promote are of low hierarchical salience within the larger belief system (hence the task of consciousness raising becomes more central, Snow/Benford 1986),
- formal organization provides more flexible tactical repertoire, therefore sustained mobilization,
- hence movements acquire, in the course of their career, formal organization and centralized control, etc.

The peculiarity and specific applicability of such findings to the American context is not usually acknowledged. Yet the widespread use of these assumptions and generalizations has been possible because the American scholarly community deals with social movements in an extremely self-referential way; it can afford to do so, because a huge English-speaking market offers ample opportunity for exchange and debate and need not induce scholars to confront comparative international data.

This "advantage" of the English speaking world's insularity is likely to be lost in the emerging new world order. There are already the beginnings of an exchange and confrontation with recent European social movement theories, some of which have exposed some of the limitations of the dominant American approaches.¹⁵

This paper is one such product of an American-European confrontation. By not presuming that the American and European paradigms share social-theoretical frameworks, it has sought to uncover the assumptions researchers have worked with in the American context, and to account for their overwhelming influence in the social and historical sciences. European theories, still influenced by more or less explicit assumptions of a class-structured society and logics of material (re)production, assume that each new reproductive stage produces and is challenged by social movements which articulate historically changing social cleavages, if not the older variety of class antagonisms. This European attitude contrasts sharply with the view of society as an unstructured ensemble of groups, of ruling classes as a relatively homogeneous elite, of the state as structurally permeable or as institutionally biased against insurgency. These various elements of the American theoretical framework together produce the image of a static

social arrangement which continually adapts, in the pluralist view, due to its permeability and openness or, in the social-democratic view, is only exceptionally perturbed.

Besides a caution against synthesizing theoretical approaches that are rooted in incompatible social-theoretical frameworks, this article has sought to account for the particularities of the American case. First, it brought to the foreground the assumptions made within classical and RM theories about the origin of social movements and about the polity within which they are located. Relating the concepts of society and politics to the patterns and qualities of social movements in American history, it showed that the themes, action repertoires, and organizational structures of these movements have been remarkably different than those in European history which were overdetermined by class movements. To account for the American case, the material basis of politics and a uniquely American political culture were examined, noting the open and decentralized structure of the American political system. The latter has prevented antagonistic polarization between movements and political the establishment. Utilitarian liberalism accounts for the repeated integration of insurgent innovative reform movements into the dominant social order. The close correspondence between movement activity and its social-science interpretations was illustrated by showing how liberal ideological assumptions that have shaped and guided American social movement practice have been incorporated into the premises and theories of American movement research.

ENDNOTES

1. This article cannot do justice to the rich variety, national specificities, and recent elaborations within European social movement theory. For this, cf. Rucht, 1991.
2. Besides the classical collective behavior and breakdown theories and the resource mobilization approach, other-not so dominant-theoretical models in the U.S. have included class-analytical approaches as well as populist-traditionalist interpretations. Cf. for an overview Mayer, 1991.
3. The variants were: the collective behavior approach (Turner/Killian, 1957; Blumer, 1951; Smelser, 1962) with its roots in the Chicago School (Park/Burgess, 1921); the mass society approach (Kornhauser, 1959); and the relative deprivation approach (Davies, 1963; Gurr, 1970).
4. See e.g. McCarthy/Zald, 1973; Oberschall, 1973; Shorter/Tilly, 1974; Gamson, 1975; Useem, 1975; Zald/McCarthy, 1979.
5. See e.g. McCarthy/Zald, 1977.
6. See Tilly, 1978; McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984; Jenkins, 1985.
7. One might also argue that the more qualifications that are added, the more problematic becomes the integrity of the "theory". An effect of these "corrections" may be that the theory becomes instead a grab-bag full of too many disparate items, threatening to collapse it under the impulse of its upholders to keep it alive.
8. What observers have to note about these new types of movements is that their goals keep emerging and evolving in a process of internal and external communication and

- adaptation. They demonstrate particularly vividly what is probably the case for most social movements: that their unity is not given at the outset but is a precarious construct made up of different groups with different types of beliefs and different strategies for action. In the RM approach, however, "goals" and "claims" are treated as fixed, "interests" are not a variable to be explained but a given resource which the SMO can manipulate in order to attract supporters; the collective identity of a movement is assumed as given at the outset.
9. RM researchers employing these conceptual tools outside of the US find out that the conclusions arrived at on the basis of the analysis of the dominant American type of movements are of limited usefulness in other contexts. Tarrow, researching social movements in Italy, soon stumbled over the fact that "the traits of professional movement entrepreneurs are hard to discern among Italian militants." (Tarrow 1983: 50-51)
 10. Cf. for a comparison between U.S. and European social movement research Klandermans/Tarrow, 1988; Tarrow, 1988; Kitschelt, 1985.
 11. The traditional boundaries of political discourse dissolve when themes previously utterly non-political such as nature, weather, the forest, or those of gender relations or technology, have successfully been put on the political agenda by the new social movements.
 12. A "movement sector" has emerged between the state and state-oriented intermediary institutions on the one hand, and a privatized civil society on the other; Some describe this as a repoliticized civil society with networks and infrastructures of its own. This new political sphere illustrates how these social movements are, at the same time, visible protest politics/political interventions *and* sociocultural alternatives seeking to redefine the social.
 13. A notable exception is found in Tilly's work where "the operation of the polity" enters the calculations of the challengers with the categories "facilitation" and "repression." However, its limitations due to the strictly rational formulation of this model have been pointed out by Rule, 1989.
 14. A large body of political science literature is obviously concerned with processes of reform of political institutions and changes in public policy due to social movements. The effects of such innovation or reform on the movements themselves, however, are rarely raised.
 15. Collaborative research between U.S. and Western European social movement scholars has been promoted by the Council for European Studies, which facilitated a series of workshops and conferences, the results of which have been edited by Klandermans/Kriesi /Farrow, 1988. Cf. also Klandermans, 1989.

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