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NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

Discussions of New Social Movements have sought to explain the apparent shift in the forms of contemporary social movements in Western nations by linking it to the rise of a postmodern world. However, the central propositions of the NSM paradigm have not been critically analyzed in terms of its concepts or the evidence. This review provides a critical analysis of the NSM thesis, finding that the central propositions are not defensible as a theory or a paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

The "New" Social Movement (NSM) paradigm is a recent addition to social theory that stresses both the macrohistorical and microhistorical elements of social movements. On the macro level, the NSM paradigm concentrates on the relationship between the rise of contemporary social movements and the larger economic structure, and on the role of culture in such movements. On the micro level, the paradigm is concerned with how issues of identity and personal behavior are bound up in social movements. The NSM paradigm offers a historically specific vision of social movements as associated with new forms of middle-class radicalism. It presents a distinctive view of social movements and of the larger sociopolitical environment, of how individuals fit into, respond to, and change the system. However, whether this nascent view qualifies as a cogent and empirically grounded paradigm has not been seriously examined. This review provides a critique of the central propositions of the NSM paradigm, assessing the evidence supporting its claims.

The NSM paradigm argues for a temporal, structurally linked understanding of social movements. Social movements are seen as being shaped and largely determined by social structure. In the industrial era, following a Marxist logic, social movements were believed to be centered in the working class. Working class movements were seen as instrumentally based actions concerned with matters of economic redistribution. Regardless of whether social movements of the industrial era can be characterized in such categorical terms, it was the standard by which contemporary movements were compared. Contemporary movements (post-1965) were, however, not well explained by social theories that saw the working class as the site of revolutionary protest (Eyerman 1984, Olofsson 1988). In Europe, the defining events were the wide-scale student protests that took place in France and Berlin in 1968 and in Italy in 1969. In the United States, the rise of the student antiwar movement of the mid-1960s was seen as marking a similar radical departure from the past. In Europe, where Marxist theories of social movements dominated, Marxist theorists were unable to provide a convincing explanation for why students had become the vanguard of protest and why movement demands centered around quality of life rather than redistributive issues (Touraine 1971). With the predicted Marxist revolution not in sight, the shift of protest away from the working class, and the changing shape and form of protest in contemporary times, Marxist theorists saw the need to reformulate their ideas. While not all Marxist went in the same direction (see Boggs 1986), some of them postulated the NSM paradigm as an alternative (see Cohen 1985, Melucci 1980, 1985, Touraine 1977, 1981). In fact, much of the NSM discourse can be said to be a direct reaction to the perceived deficiencies of Marxism (Epstein 1990, Laclau & Mouffe 1985, Plotke 1990).

NSM PARADIGM

Although there are differing perspectives on NSMs (see Buechler 1995 for an overview), a set of core concepts and beliefs can be said to comprise the NSM paradigm. The central claims of the NSM paradigm are, first, that NSMs are a product of the shift to a postindustrial economy and, second, that NSMs are unique and, as such, different from social movements of the industrial age. NSMs are said to be a product of the postmaterial age (some refer to it as mature capitalism or postindustrialism) and are seen as fundamentally different from the working class movements of the industrial period (Olofsson 1988). NSM demands are believed to have moved away from the instrumental issues of industrialism to the quality of life issues of postmaterialism (Buechler 1995, Burklin 1984, Inglehart 1990, Parkin 1968). NSMs are, in short, qualitatively different (Melucci 1981).

However, when broadly related to contemporary movements, these observations are essentially flawed. Just as the Marxist theories tended to marginalize protest that did not stem from the working class, so too have NSM theorists marginalized social movements that do not originate from the left. Contemporary right-wing movements are not the subject of their focus. Thus, the NSM paradigm describes (at best) only a portion of the social movement universe. But there is no a priori reason for eliminating conservative and counter-movements from consideration. One might excuse the omission of counter-movements because they are believed to be reactions to insurgent movements, largely determined by the goals, ideology, tactics, and participants (in a negative way) of these (see Mottl 1980, Pichardo 1995, Zald & Useem 1987). However, this is not the case for movements, many of which over the last 20 years seem to be unique reactions (of a conservative character) to the alienating effects of postindustrial society. Some examples include the Christian Right and militia movements. However, the NSM paradigm is based solely on observations of left-wing movements and reflects this ideological bias undergirding the NSM paradigm. Yet, movements of both the left and the right are linked to changes in social structure. Understanding how other social groups perceive and react to these changes can only broaden our knowledge of social change.

The NSM paradigm can only claim to explain left-wing movements of the modern age.¹ Among the movements typically studied by NSM researchers are the "urban social struggles, the environmental or ecology movements, women's and gay liberation, the peace movement, and cultural revolt linked primarily to student and youth activism" (Boggs 1986:39–40). Is there any reason to believe that the populations supporting these movements, which are said to be a product of a fundamental change in the economic structure, should be affected while those populations supporting the militia, right-to-life, wise use, and Christian right movements should not be similarly affected? Although a possible rationale for this distinction could be constructed, the NSM perspective offers none, and its failure to do so marks a serious flaw in its reasoning.² It is not the purpose of this review to extend the NSM thesis to right-wing movements, although I shall offer some tentative suggestions in the conclusion.

Putting this aside for now, let's review the NSM paradigm in terms of what it claims. As is typical of new paradigms in the process of establishing themselves, their propositions are strongly stated (or perhaps overstated) to firmly

¹In all fairness, most social movement theories are based on observations of left-wing movements; this is a broad failing of social movement research in general. Nonetheless, with the current growth of right-wing conservative movements in the modern era, it is perhaps especially pertinent to NSM theory to account for them as well.

²This refers specifically to why other social groups (especially conservative groups) do not engage in activism.

distinguish them from other theories. Subsequently, these strong propositions are reevaluated, and weaker propositions may be substituted. Strong statements may be hard to defend. This is especially the case for the NSM paradigm. Many of its original strong propositions have been found wanting. Therefore, I focus here primarily on the weaker versions.

Are Contemporary Movements Unique?

The first claim of the NSM paradigm is that contemporary movements are fundamentally different in character than movements of the past. These differences are said to appear in the ideology and goals, tactics, structure, and participants of contemporary movements.

IDEOLOGY AND GOALS The central factor characteristic of NSMs is their distinct ideological outlook (Dalton et al 1990). It is from this difference that all others flow. The NSM paradigm states that contemporary social movements represent a fundamental break from industrial era movements. Rather than focusing on economic redistribution (as do working-class movements), NSMs emphasize quality of life and life-style concerns. Thus, NSMs question the wealth-oriented materialistic goals of industrial societies. They also call into question the structures of representative democracies that limit citizen input and participation in governance, instead advocating direct democracy, self-help groups, and cooperative styles of social organization. "The theme of the self-defense and democratization, raised implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) by the movements, . . . [is] the most significant element in the contemporary struggle for democratization" (Cohen 1983:102). Taken together, the values of NSMs center on autonomy and identity (Offe 1985).

In many ways, identity claims are the most distinctive feature of NSMs (Kauffman 1990), although all previous movements can also be described as expressing identity claims (see e.g. Aronowitz 1992). The focus on identity is considered unique in modern movements because "identity politics also express the belief that identity itself—its elaboration, expression, or affirmation—is and should be a fundamental focus of political work. In this way, the politics of identity have led to an unprecedented politicization of previously nonpolitical terrains . . ." (Kauffman 1990:67). This is expressed in the notion that "the personal is political." However, whether the politics of identity represents a liberation or stagnation of modern politics is a point of contention. The liberation of joining the personal with the political may represent a radical challenge to the hegemony of state domination, but it may also result in an "anti-politics of identity"—an apolitical withdrawal from politics (Kauffman 1990).

However, little empirical work has examined the impact of identity claims on social movement participation, with two notable exceptions: Klandermans

(1994) has examined, in the Dutch peace movement, how the varying collective identities, as represented by the different organizational memberships, predicted the defection of participants from the movement. NA Pichardo, H Sullivan-Catlin, & G Deane (unpublished manuscript) have examined the role of personal identity in relation to participation in the environmental movement. Their findings show a significant, though not strong, association between self-reported environmental identity and participation both in conventional social movement activities (event participation, organizational membership, movement contributions) and in everyday behaviors (conserving energy and water, using alternative transportation, and purchasing products made from recycled materials). Clearly, more empirical work on the connection between identity, at all its levels, and movement participation needs to be done.

The other, supposedly unique, ideological feature of NSMs is its self-reflexive character. This means that participants are constantly questioning the meaning of what is being done (Cohen 1985, Gusfield 1994, Melucci 1994). This has led to conscious choices of structure and action—choices said to typify NSMs. The best example of this is the consciousness-raising groups characteristic of the feminist movement (Van der Gaag 1985; see also the volume edited by Katzenstein & Muller 1987). The decision to organize in a decentralized fashion, to operate under democratic principles with rotating leadership, is seen by some as consistent with Michel's Iron Law of Oligarchy, whereby the goals of organizations become displaced (Kitschelt 1990). The unique ideological orientation and self-reflexive character largely dictate the kinds of tactics, structures, and participants evidenced in NSMs.

TACTICS The tactics of NSMs mirror their ideological orientation. The belief in the unrepresentative character of modern democracies is consistent with its anti-institutional tactical orientation. NSMs prefer to remain outside of normal political channels, employing disruptive tactics and mobilizing public opinion to gain political leverage. They also tend to use highly dramatic and preplanned forms of demonstrations replete with costumes and symbolic representations (Tarrow 1994).

This, however, does not mean that NSMs do not involve themselves in politics, nor avoid becoming institutionalized themselves. As noted by Eder (1985), "NSMs manifest a form of middle-class protest which oscillates from moral crusade to political pressure group to social movement" (p. 881). Some NSMs have become integrated into the party system and gained regular access to regulatory, implementation, and decision-making bodies, while others have formed political parties that regularly contest for electoral representation (Berry 1993, Hager 1993, Kitschelt 1990, Gelb & Paley 1982, Rochon 1990, Rochon & Mazmanian 1993, Tarrow 1990). A number of Green parties are prominent in

Europe, with several having local manifestations in the United States (Bahro 1986, Burklin 1982, 1985, Capra & Spretnak 1984, Hershey 1993, Kolinsky 1989, Muller-Rommel 1985, 1990, Poguntke 1993). However, no direct correspondence appears between supporters of NSMs and those who vote for Green parties (Chandler & Siaroff 1986, Muller-Rommel 1985). So, the NSM paradigm recognizes that there is no truly distinctive tactical style of NSMs: rather, public opinion and anti-institutional politics have been recent and more prominent additions to the repertoire of social movements.

STRUCTURE The anti-institutional posture of NSMs also extends to the way they organize. NSMs attempt to replicate in their own structures the type of representative government they desire. That is, they organize themselves in a fluid nonrigid style that avoids the dangers of oligarchization. They tend to rotate leadership, vote communally on all issues, and to have impermanent ad hoc organizations (Offe 1985). They also espouse an anti-bureaucratic posture, arguing against what they perceive as the dehumanizing character of modern bureaucracy.

[NSMs] oppose the bureaucratization of society in economics and politics that allegedly suffocates the ability of individual citizens to participate in the definition of collective goods and identities. Instead they call for a culturally libertarian transformation of social institutions that gives more leeway to individual choice and collective self-organization outside the economic commodity cycle or bureaucratic political organization (Kitschelt 1993:15).

Thus, they call for and create structures that are more responsive to the needs of the individuals—open, decentralized, nonhierarchical (Zimmerman 1987). Motivated by the lessons of the past, they hope to avoid becoming coopted or deradicalized. This is to claim, not that all NSMs are so organized, but that this form of organizing is more prevalent than in past times. The ideal-typical organizational style of NSMs should not be seen as reflecting the organizational styles of every NSM. Groups such as the National Organization of Women, and various environmental groups employ more traditional centralized, hierarchical forms of organization (Paley & Leif 1982, Shaiko 1993).

PARTICIPANTS There are two views on who the participants of NSMs are and why they join. The first places the base of support within the “new” middle class: a recently emerged social stratum employed in the nonproductive sectors of the economy (Cotgrove & Duff 1981, Lowe & Goyder 1983, Rudig 1988). Research on the rise of the new middle class within postindustrial society seems to establish the credibility of this social phenomenon (Brint 1994). But NSM theorists go a step beyond, by arguing that this stratum produces the chief participants of NSMs because they are not bound to the corporate profit motive

nor dependent on the corporate world for their sustenance. Instead, they tend to work in areas that are highly dependent upon state expenditures such as academia, the arts, and human service agencies, and they tend to be highly educated (Offe 1985). Another explanation posits that NSMs are the result of conflict over the control of work.

In this conflict, the professionals whose control is based on expertise and skills are defending themselves against the encroachments on their work autonomy by colleagues who are primarily involved in the administration of the large private and public employers for whom the former work. Tending to lose out in this conflict, the skills and service-oriented professionals constitute a crucial structural potential for the new social movements, all of which attack in one way or another the unrestricted reign of technocracy (Kriesi et al 1995:xix).

However, there is recognition that within this overall descriptive categorization differences exist.

The other view of the participants of NSMs is that they are not defined by class boundaries but are marked by a common concern over social issues. It is an ideological, rather than ethnic, religious, or class-based community. In this light Arato & Cohen (1984) refer to the West German Greens as a "catch-all" party. They are defined by common values rather than a common structural location. Offe (1985) offers a slightly different view of who the NSM participants are. He argues that they are drawn from three sectors: the new middle class, elements of the old middle class (farmers, shop owners, and artisan-producers), and a "peripheral" population consisting of persons not heavily engaged in the labor market (students, housewives, and retired persons). A number of studies of the peace movement in various countries have demonstrated an equally diverse set of participants (Parkin 1968; see also the volume edited by Kaltefleiter & Pfaltzgraff 1985). Diani & Lodi (1988) show that within the Milan ecology movement, several different currents attract somewhat different sets of participants.

However, neither view, in its narrowly defined sense, is supported by the evidence. Studies of environmental movements reveal that NSM participants are drawn primarily from two populations: The "new" middle class is one; the other is geographically bound communities that are being directly affected by the negative externalities of industrial growth. Participants are the more ideologically committed middle class as well as communities that protest the siting of hazardous waste sites, landfills, and waste incinerators, or chemical and/or radiation poisoning of the local environment (see Apter & Sawa 1984, 1970, Opp 1988, Szasz 1994, Walsh 1981). The old middle class typically is also involved in regional issues (Touraine 1981). In short, the participants of environmental movements do not draw significantly from outside the white middle class unless there is some motivating, geographically based, grievance. For example, minority

communities have rarely participated in the environmental movement, except in protest over the placement of unwanted waste facilities (Bullard 1990).³ The lack of minority participation is equally true of most other NSMs, including the animal rights, feminist, peace, and gay and lesbian movements.

Whether middle-class participants engaged significantly in protest in the past is a critical question for the NSM paradigm. Such activity has been severely underestimated. Waves of middle-class protest have occurred since the early 1800s in both Europe and the United States. These include the abolition, prohibition, suffrage, and progressive (as well as a number of nativist) movements. Thus, whether the middle class is only newly involved in social movements is indeed open to question.

Are these proposed characteristics unique? If such differences exist, then it would mark a significant break from the past. The problem is that too many exceptions are cited. NSMs espouse open, democratic, nonhierarchical structures, yet there are many NSM organizations that are not so characterized. They disdain institutional politics, yet many NSMs are regularly consulted by governmental bodies, and others have formed political parties. NSMs tend to draw from the new middle class, yet many community-based mobilizations (primarily environmental) have developed. Furthermore, the middle class is not a new site of social protest. NSMs tend to employ nontraditional tactics but also use those commonly employed by social movements of the past (lobbying, getting out the vote, court cases, etc).

One cannot evade the fact that the striking feature of the contemporary . . . situation of the movements is its heterogeneity. The old patterns of collective action certainly continue to exist. In some movements they may even be statistically preponderant (Cohen 1985:665).

Not only are the individual characteristics of movements in question, so too are those of the new social movements in general. D'Anieri et al (1990) argue that there is no difference between utopian movements of the 1800s and present-day movements. In a similar vein, Calhoun (1991) sees no stark differences between movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arguing that social movements of the nineteenth century were not dominated by economic organizations.

The notion of movement "newness" has also been criticized in terms of whether contemporary movements represent a distinct break from movements of the past. For Touraine (1982), this radical departure is a function of their level of reflexivity and the changed locuses and stakes of the struggles. For Evers (1985), what is new about NSMs is that the "transformatory potential within new social movements is not political, but socio-cultural" (p. 49). That is, they aim to reappropriate society from the state. However, a host of other

³This kind of placement has been referred to as environmental racism, a term grounded in the belief that decisions about locating hazardous waste sites ignore the interests of minority groups.

authors have stressed the continuity of NSMs with previous movements (Cohen 1985, Crighton & Mason 1986, Eder 1985). Perhaps Melucci (1994) put the nature and importance of this controversy in the best light when he said it was futile. It is not a question of deciding whether the empirical data observed are equivalent and comparable; instead, the question is whether their meaning and the place they occupy in the system of social relations can be considered to be the same (1994:105).

Apart from whether NSMs represent breaks from previous movements, a related question is whether NSMs are new at all. As noted above, NSMs often contain elements of the old and new. Eder (1985) sees NSMs as embracing two types of phenomena: Cultural movements that “oppose present social life . . . [and] political movements [that] challenge modern state domination” (p. 5). Mouffe (1984) sees the novelty of NSMs not in the new antagonisms but in the “diffusion of social conflict into other areas and the politicization of more and more relations” (p. 141).

However, some have been especially critical of the claims to originality of new social movements. Rather than arguing continuity or discontinuity with previous movements, Plotke (1990) criticizes the impact of NSM theory on the direction of social movements. He argues that accounts of a widespread “new social movement discourse” are wrong in crucial ways. Dubious claims about the movements, about what they are and should be, are politically significant because they are taken seriously both by analysts and by some participants within the movements” (p. 81). These “dubious claims” are an outgrowth of the theoretical conflict with Marxism, which has left NSM theorists “unprepared to engage in the theoretical and political debate in the United States, where neoconservative interpretations became dominant in the late 1970s and 1980s” (p. 82). In other words, the debate over what’s new is not just an academic polemic; it has real consequences for movements that may leave them vulnerable to counterattacks.

Are Contemporary Movements a Product of the Postindustrial Era?

Related to the question of “what’s new” is a second issue—whether NSMs are a product of the shift to a postindustrial economy. There is disagreement over the exact nature of this relationship. Two schools of thought exist—one stresses an objective and the other, a subjective class position (see Eder 1985). The objective school stresses social structural factors that formed “new” social classes as oppositional groups, while the subjective school of thought stresses attitudinal changes that have formed like-minded groups. Within the objective school, the first variation, what I call the “state intrusion” hypothesis, is a post-Marxist view that links the rise of NSMs to the changing requirements of capital accumulation in the postmodern age. With the advent of a service/technical economy

with its emphasis on growth and information management, capital accumulation necessitates social as well as economic domination. Social domination involves controlling dissent and knowledge (ensuring conformity) and therefore requires an expansion of the state's coercive mechanisms into the civic sphere (Habermas 1987, Melucci 1984, Sassoon 1984, Touraine 1971). NSMs are concerned with the "self-defense of 'society' against the state . . . and the market economy . . ." (Cohen 1985:664). Habermas (1981) refers to the process by which the state and market economy substitute strategic action for the symbolic processes of communication as "inner colonization."

Mouffe (1984) offers a different version. She sees a similar process except that she links it to the commodification of social life (where social needs depend on the market for satisfaction), bureaucratization (resulting from the intervention of the state into all areas of social reproduction), and cultural masculinization (resulting from the pervasive influence of the mass media that destroys or modifies existing collective identities). These new forms of subordination are responsible for the rise of NSMs, which represent novel forms of resistance.

The unique nature of conflict in modern societies is said to be partly a function of three characteristics of domination and deprivation. First, the impact of the state and economy on society is said to no longer be class specific but "dispersed in time, space, and kind so as to affect virtually every member of society in a broad variety of ways" (Offe 1985:844). Second, there has been a deepening of domination and social control, making its effects more comprehensive and inescapable. Third, the political and economic institutions have lost the ability to correct their own defects (irreversibility) requiring action from outside the official political institutions to correct its flaws (Offe 1985).

NSMs are believed to be a reaction to the state's attempts to control the civic sphere.⁴ For some, what is unique about NSMs is that they "emerge primarily outside the bourgeois public sphere . . . as extra-institutional phenomena rooted in civil society . . . [that] point to a recovery of civil society" (Boggs 1986:47). Thus, we see movements that are concerned with cultural questions (involving matters of sexual identification, role definitions, and community). NSMs are also reactions to the expansive (growth oriented) nature of postindustrialism, which needs to neglect the social costs of growth to maintain profitability. This growth orientation has two principal consequences. First, it produces a mass consumer culture marked by mega-malls, strip malls, mass advertising, and planned obsolescence. Many NSMs reject this form of cultural manipulation. Second, the requirements of a mass consumer culture have negative environmental manifestations that are largely unwelcome and unwanted. These include garbage dumps, incinerators, and toxic pollution as well as the exploitation of

⁴This should not be confused with the tactical choices of movements, such as the animal rights movement, that often attempt to mobilize the state to enter into the civic sphere to attain their goals.

the environment for the raw materials of industrial production. Thus, NSMs also represent quality of life concerns. Ultimately, the aim of participants in NSMs is "not to seize power in order to build a new world, but to regain power over their own lives by disengaging from the market rationality of productivism" (Gorz 1982:75).

Some theorists have used the writings of Gramsci to illuminate the processes of cultural domination that the state employs to maintain power (see Carroll 1992 for an overview). This "cultural Marxism" is a critique of "Marx's concepts of the relations and forces of production for inadequate attention to the conscious experience of institutions and creative practical reasoning" (Weiner 1982:13). This emphasis on the cultural basis of conflict in the modern era is imputed to be one of the defining characteristics of NSMs (Cohen 1983, Eder 1985, Feher & Heller 1983, Gorz 1982, Melucci 1980, Scott 1990). The ideological hegemony of the state requires counter-hegemonic actions by social movements to dismantle the dominant social views that reinforce the legitimacy of the capitalist system (Cohen 1983). Current notions, such as that "the personal is political," that is, that everyday behavior has political ramifications and, by implication, supports the hegemony of the ruling classes, reflect the emphasis of NSMs on doing battle not only on an economic level but also on a cultural level (Mooers & Sears 1992). This "culture conflict" is manifested in the life-style emphasis of NSMs and is fought on symbolic and identity levels (Kauffman 1990, Weiner 1982).

The second school of thought concerning the origins of NSMs places their cause in the subjective consciousness of the actors. There are two principal variants. The first is the "value shift" hypothesis that centers around the larger economic, political, and social context of Western nations.⁵ This view states that the people of Western nations have reached a point of economic and political security in the modern age (where their basic needs for sustenance and survival are relatively assured). This confidence led to a shift in public opinion (culture) away from issues relating to economic or political security to issues of personal growth and self-actualization. The underlying mechanism is based on a Maslowian psychological scheme where an individual is first and foremost concerned with issues of survival and security; once these basic needs are satisfied, one is able to move up the ladder to higher-order concerns (Falik 1983, Inglehart 1977, 1981). This scheme implies that the socialization experiences of various age cohorts, and the conditions of scarcity present during their formative years, result in a fixed materialistic or postmaterialistic orientation. Thus, NSMs represent the shift to postmaterial values that stress issues of identity, participation, and quality of life rather than economic matters. But the value

⁵This is referred to by Poguntke (1993) as a *structural change* approach. See also Kitschelt (1988) and Markovits & Meyer (1985).

changes are not the only attitudinal changes that result in NSMs. For Inglehart (1977), postmaterial values combine with increases in political efficacy and political distrust to result in increased political activism. This view says nothing about actions of the state except in so much as it provides for the economic and political security of its populace.

The second value change variant concerning the origins of NSMs is the "cycle of protests" argument. It states that NSMs are simply recent manifestations of a cyclical pattern of social movements (see Tarrow 1983). Some link the cycles to "anti-modern or romantic-ideological reactions to functional principles, contradictions, and alienating effects of modern societies" (Brand 1990:24; see also Eder 1982), others to recurring waves of cultural criticisms linked to changes in the cultural climate (Brand 1990) or to political and social events. These periods are said to act as fertile ground for the proliferation of social movements sensitizing the population to the problems of modern societies (Brand 1990, Rudig 1988).

However, the evidence supporting these views is not conclusive. The "state intrusion" hypothesis suffers because of the difficulty in empirically establishing a link between the actions of the state and incidence of NSMs. Such connections can only be drawn by inference, by establishing the meaning and intent of actions of the state and hypothesizing about their consequences. "The work of interpretation is inevitably risky and less totalizing" (Cohen 1985:665). Specifically, the hypothesized changes in the state are vague and difficult to operationalize, and the mechanism by which actions of the state are linked to social movements is not specified.

The "value shift" hypothesis, on the other hand, is based on empirical observations of changes in public opinion over the last 30 years. The evidence of a value shift seems compelling. Opinion studies in both Europe and North America have chronicled a change in the values of the public that moved from economic to non-economic concerns, as is suggested by the hypothesis (Inglehart 1977, 1981, 1990, Kaase 1990). However, there are several problems with this thesis.

First, the hypothesis locates the value change in a specific class segment: the so-called "new" middle class (Inglehart 1990). However, the "new" middle class is defined in widely divergent ways that contribute to inconsistent results from various investigations. This is also true of the indicators employed to mark the differences between the "new" middle class and other social classes. Several formulations of the "new" middle class (Ehrenreich & Ehrenreich 1977, Gouldner 1979, Kristol 1972, Ladd 1978, 1979) employed differing definitions of the new middle class and produced inconsistent results. Brint (1984) tested the four variations by looking at the presence of "antibusiness" and "egalitarian" sentiment among the groups as defined by each of the above researchers. He found that the four groups defined as composing the "new" middle class did

not possess dissenting attitudes. He concluded that "the theorists were simply incorrect in [that they] . . . exaggerated the levels of dissent and even the levels of liberalism found in the new class" (p. 60). Brint's review shows that NSM scholars have failed to provide empirical evidence that would allow them to conclude with confidence that such a new and militant class, linked to NSMs, has arisen in the United States or Europe.

The second problem with the value shift hypothesis is that the cause for the value change is imputed to be a function of the increasing security and prosperity of modern Western countries. This connection is less amenable to direct empirical verification. Other possible explanations for the rise in postmodern values could be offered including the growing bureaucratization of society, or that the values are cyclical rather than rooted in the ability of the economic structure to provide for the material benefit of the population.⁶

Third, relying strictly on economic affluence as indicating postmaterialism may miss more important determinants of social values. As stated by Cotgrove & Duff (1981), "perhaps Inglehart and later researchers have been looking at the wrong kind of variables to explain support for postmaterialism. By concentrating on the level of affluence of an individual as determinant, they have neglected ideals [that is, personal values] as a possible cause" (p. 98). The point is that there may be a difference between public and private values and that one's public values may be more central to predicting support for postmaterial values.

Fourth, the two elements of Inglehart's model, the arguments concerning scarcity and socialization, lead to contradictory expectations. As stated by Boltken & Jagodzinski (1985),

If the responses to the value index reflect internalized value orientations, they should be fairly stable in adulthood. If, on the other hand, respondent behavior is affected to a larger extent by economic changes, usually no stability can be expected. But the same sequence of actions cannot be both stable and unstable (p. 444).

The "cycle of protests" argument that ties changes in the cultural climate to waves of movements differs from the "value shift" hypothesis in that it adds a time dimension to the shift in social mood and makes no assertions about the structural source of social movements. There is no significant body of literature testing the historical dimension of the argument, although such shifts have been noted by other authors (Hirschman 1981, Huntington 1981, Namenwirth & Weber 1987, Schlesinger 1986). Brand (1990) has done a comparative study of Germany, England, and the United States that shows a linkage between phases of

⁶A discussion of new social movements in Latin America, by Slater (1985) also indirectly refutes the belief that economic prosperity and the concomitant value changes it begets underlie the rise of NSMs. Latin American nations can hardly be described as capable of satisfying the basic needs for economic and physical security of their people. However, without ascertaining whether the model provided by NSMs is in some manner being diffused, the existence of NSMs in Latin America cannot be used as definitive refutation of the value change hypothesis.

cultural criticisms and the manifestation of new middle-class radicalism (social movements) from 1800–1990. Pichardo (1993) presents a similar argument for the Populist/Progressive era movements in the United States, which demonstrate striking similarities to the rise of NSMs. The middle-class radicalism of that period is linked to the advancing restrictions on community space brought about by industrialism. But these data are too preliminary to be convincing.

However, in terms of whether NSMs are a product of the postindustrial age, the cycles-of-protest argument implicitly responds in the negative. For if the values are tied to the rise of postindustrial society or linked to the rise of the new middle class, then they could not have been present before. Brand's formulation may be a way to reconcile the two views, but that would require the NSM thesis to be substantially altered.

Yet another strain of critique casts doubt on the connection between the larger macro-historical societal changes associated with postindustrialism and NSMs. Olofsson (1988) argues that the "cultural revolutionary activities . . . [of NSMs] can be articulated with very different politico-ideological formations, social groups, and classes" (p. 31). In other words, there is no necessary connection between postindustrialism and the project of NSMs.

Similarly, the "cycles of protest" argument has an alternative explanation.⁷ Rather than seeing them as a consequence of changing values associated with modernization, which in turn dictate tactical options that are in concert with the values, another point of view suggests that changes in the tactical repertoire of movements are independent of the values and goals expressed by the movement. Rather than linking changes in tactics to new values and goals, they are to be seen more in terms of an evolving interaction between the agents of repression and movement actors where new tactics are an outcome of the ability of agents of repression to accommodate to the old tactics, thereby rendering them ineffective (Koopmans 1983). New tactics are a response to the need to find new forms of effective tactics. Another explanation for the waves of protest argues that they are the outcome of competition between movement organizations (Tarrow 1989, 1991). In this view, the competition for resources and membership between movement organizations leads to innovation, militancy, then decline. Tarrow (1991) further argues that those who argue for the "newness" of contemporary movements have simply mistaken an early phase of movement development for a new historical stage of collective action.

Finally, the NSM thesis limits the phenomenon to Western nations, yet some authors have attempted to extend the thesis to underdeveloped countries. Slater (1985), in an interesting turn on the NSM thesis, relates Latin American contemporary movements to excessive centralization of decision-making power, the state's incapacity to deliver adequate social services, and the eroding legitimacy

⁷This idea was suggested by Bert Klandermans.

of the state.⁸ But the mere presence of NSMs in non-Western nations argues against both hypotheses—of state intrusion (because NSMs are triggered by the change to a postindustrial economy, a change not occurring in Latin American nations) or of value change (because the value changes are a product of the economic and physical security of a country's population, which also cannot be said to be characteristic of Latin American nations).

What remains is of questionable value as a paradigm or theory. The relationship between structure and the rise of contemporary movements is at best uncertain, and most of the so-called unique characteristics and features are not unique. What seems to be unique is their ideological (identity) orientation—the one hypothesized characteristic that seems truly to mark a break from the past.

SUMMARY

So what have we? There is significant doubt in terms of whether contemporary movements are specifically a product of postindustrial society. The mechanisms cited within the NSM literature disagree significantly, depending on the variation. In turn, each of these variations has significant weaknesses—inconclusive empirical support, questionable operationalization of variables, ambiguous or abstract concepts, and feasible alternative explanations. The same could be said for whether contemporary movements represent anything unique. Except for the issue of identity, the so-called unique characteristics of contemporary movements are not unique at all. At best, it can be argued that they are recent additions to the repertoire of social movements. But changes in repertoires have been noted by other authors (most notably Tilly 1979) without employing explanations that call for new theories.

The principal contributions of the NSM perspective are its emphases on identity, culture, and the role of the civic sphere—aspects of social movements that had been largely overlooked. The failure to attend to identity issues was rooted in the belief that social movement participation was instrumentally based. In fact, Parkin (1968) believes that the expressive dimension of participation may be a feature of social movements dominated by the middle class. The expressive nature of participation is linked to the cultural aspects of movements as the goal of expressive action is guided by a particular moral outlook concerning the appropriate normative order. The civic sphere, where culture resides, which had traditionally been seen as being dominated or determined by the economic sphere, is now seen as a locus of social protest. This “liberation” of the civic sphere has brought to focus the realization that the civic sphere is an area of contention just as are the economic and political spheres.

⁸Slater employed Mouffe's commodification variation of the state-intrusion hypothesis, which is not linked to the capacity of governments to provide for the physical and economic security of its populace.

However, the need for a new theory of social movements to account for these differences is uncertain. Not that social movement theory (in particular the resource mobilization theory) presented a complete account of movement dynamics (see Canel 1992, Klandermans 1986, Klandermans & Tarrow 1986). But a modification of theory that attended to the "why" of movements in addition to the "how" would seem to be a better direction to proceed.

CONCLUSION

The inability of the NSM school to adequately defend its most central propositions argues against labeling or referring to the NSM thesis as a paradigm or theory about contemporary movements. Nor can simply arguing that the NSM thesis applies only to left-wing movements of the contemporary era salvage its image as a theory. Even limiting the thesis to oppositional movements (which traditionally come from the left) is insufficient as many conservative movements can also be so characterized. The added inability to argue convincingly for a typology of contemporary movements or a link to changes in socioeconomic structures leaves the NSM thesis untenable as a theory.

Does that mean that there is nothing behind this school of thought? Is it, as Tarrow (1991) believes, that researchers mistook an early phase of movement development for a new historical stage of collective action, or did something genuinely unique take place? The principal question is not whether contemporary movements display unique characteristics, for the tactics and styles of movements are often a function of expediency rather than principle and thus are guided by the utilitarian logic of achieving goals. It is more a matter of whether contemporary movements are reacting to the changing nature of domination in the postindustrial world. Put another way, are contemporary movements unique because of the unique character of domination necessitated by the emergence of the postindustrial era?

In my opinion, any rescue of the NSM thesis must begin with an inclusion of contemporary conservative movements both presently and historically. With such an inclusion the process of government intrusion into the civic sphere would be more clearly highlighted as conservative mobilizations are also reacting to the actions of governments to control the civic sphere. The religious values that underpin the ideological structure of many conservative movements must be seen as an additional source of friction that has always resided in and traditionally dominated the civic sphere. With the separation of church and state that took place in the eighteenth century, religious groups lost their state-sanctioned privileged position within the civic sphere.⁹ Many conservative

⁹This was because the coercive mechanisms of the state were no longer available to religious groups to sanction wayward believers. Thus, the cultural behavioral codes preferred by religious groups could no longer be guaranteed to dominate the civic sphere.

mobilizations in the United States of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can be understood as attempts by religious groups to coerce the state to enforce behavioral and moral codes consistent with their beliefs. Thus, the evolving history of the civic sphere and the social and political conflicts involving the civic sphere need to be detailed. In this way, we can better understand the nature of modern conflict and the role of the civic sphere in generating and maintaining that conflict. It is the observation concerning the role of the civic sphere (where culture and identity reside) in modern conflict that is perhaps the most provocative and informative aspect of the NSM thesis and the element around which a reformulation of the NSM thesis should be constructed.

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