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The Local in the Global: Rethinking Social Movements in the New Millennium

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Abstract

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The Local in the Global:

Rethinking Social Movements in the New Millennium

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¹ The order of the names is alphabetical. Both authors have contributed equally to this collaboration.

**The Local in the Global:
Rethinking Social Movements in the New Millennium**

The turn of the 20th century saw a proliferation of locally-based social movements such as the landless workers movement in Brazil, “livability movements” in third world cities, “peoples planning” in Kerala, India, and living wage and “justice for janitors” movements in the US. These movements, all of which seek to build participatory democratic mechanisms for economic and political justice, came to the attention of most social movement analysts only when the activists who participated in such local movements came together in the streets of Seattle or international forums like the World Social Forum at Porto Alegre.

For social movement analysts, it is the transnational character of these forums and protests that have excited the most attention. Many have noted that these movements combined the local and the global, but nonetheless, it is the global-ness and massiveness of the protests that has sparked the greatest interest rather than what has happened locally on the ground. In part this is because it is the global-ness that is new, and the massiveness that seems to hold out the greatest possibility of political impact (Mayekiso 1996). Thus, we have studies, for example, of such things as transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002), of the ways that national or global processes directly or indirectly affect transnational movements (Barrell and Kurzman 2004; Kay 2005; Smith and Johnston 2002; Giugni 1998; Tarrow 2001 and 2005), of the ways that the media shapes mobilization (Kolb 2005) and of the growth in transnational connections among anti-systemic movements (Evans 2005; Smith 2008).

The local and generative² aspects of these movements have received much less consideration. And yet, it is the local struggles, especially the ways that they have created and used new institutions in civil society through extending and deepening democracy that may be the most significant aspect of recent social movements, both for our theories and for our societies (Balanyá 2005). These aspects have received less attention, we believe, for two reasons. First, they are less immediately dramatic than the kind of protest that erupted in Seattle (1999), Genoa (2001), or Florence (2002). Second, and relatedly, they are less well understood by dominant social movement theories, which tend to focus on high profile protest events.

The old theories of social movements do not help us understand the local and generative dynamics and processes of these new movements because they reflect a particular configuration of relations among the state, society, and the economy that emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries. These centuries were strongly marked by the growth of elaborated and interventionist states with expanded state capacity to shape and influence economic development and organize civil society. Over the course of the 20th century states increasingly were able to subordinate both the economy and civil society to state demands while simultaneously acting in the interest of the economy and civil society. Thus, reflecting the movements they were studying, 20th century scholarship on social movements focused on challenges to states because states had the capacity and willingness to grant social and economic concessions (e.g., Tilly 1995; McAdam 1999 [1982]; Tarrow 1998). But the 1990s produced new possibilities as the old configuration among states, civil society, and economy was increasingly challenged by increasing market penetration and a lessening of state

² By “generative” aspects, we mean forms of organizing that focus on building alternatives and new collective capacities for civic engagement rather than simply oppositional politics. See below.

intervention in the economy to protect and advance the interests of its citizens. While the new configuration brought with it many negative implications for efforts at societal transformation, it also held new possibilities that took root in libratory notions of civil society. As a result, we have seen an explosion of local social movements around the world. In recent years there have been vibrant struggles emerging from civil society for water in Bolivia and India, for democratic reforms in Burma and Zimbabwe, anti-austerity movements in Peru, Brazil, and Argentina, urban movements in the Philippines, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, and for a living wage in communities across the United States (Bond, 2004: 11-12; Luce 2004; Sohn and Luce 2008). For example, in South Africa in 2003 there were 58,000 Community Based Organizations (CBOs) of which 55% (32,000) were informal and voluntary and only about 17% (10,000) were NGOs (Greenstein 2003: 21-22). Many of these CBOs were engaged in social movement activities that prioritize local-level organizing over national protests.

In this article, we begin with a brief overview of social movement theorizing, highlighting the importance of Charles Tilly's historical work on the emergence of social movements and Doug McAdam's study of the American civil rights movement. Together the works of Tilly and McAdam have been the most influential studies in the construction of the dominant political process model of social movements, which has profoundly shaped the field of social movements in North America.

While the political process model has been criticized from a range of perspectives (e.g. Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Buechler 2000; Crossley 2002; Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Johnson and Klandermans 1995; Melucci 1988a, 1996) few have highlighted its neglect of the role of community organizing in social movement trajectories.

Yet, as we will argue, it is precisely this local level of community organizing that is a key dimension of contemporary movements. We next theorize the changing relations among civil society, the state and the economy that underlies the increasing focus on organizing rather than mobilizing and on the local rather than the national in many recent movements. We will then look to the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil and the Justice for Janitors (JforJ) campaigns in the United States to illustrate the growing significance of local and generative aspects of social movements. By generative practices we mean forms of organizing that focus on building alternatives and new collective capacities for civic engagement rather than simply oppositional politics.

Finally, we will conclude by calling on social movement scholars to reorient social movement theory by taking seriously recent changes in the nature of collective action.

Social Movements Theorizing

The leading theory of social movements, today, certainly in the US, is the political process model. Although criticized on many fronts, no alternative theory has yet come to dominate research and debate in the field. The model grew out of the wave of social movements of the 1960s, and was strongly influenced by political sociology's focus on states in capitalist societies. It has been advanced and developed by many scholars, including Sidney Tarrow (1995, 1998), David Meyer and his coauthors (2004; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Meyer and Minkoff), and Hanspieter Kriesi and his collaborators (1995), but for our purposes we focus on Charles Tilly and Doug McAdam's work as they have heavily shaped our thinking about social movement dynamics.

One of Tilly's enormous contributions was to study protest and collective action systematically and historically. By historicizing collective action, he was able to demonstrate that social movements are modern phenomena that find their genesis in the advance of capitalism and especially with the development of the modern nation state. One of the clearest accounts of this is his seminal article "Social Movements and National Politics" (1984) in which he argues that while people have banded together collectively to push for change since the beginning of society, a social movement form of popular contention emerged only with the formation of modern democratic states. Tilly's work suggests that protest actions have to occur across a broad arena in order to influence modern nation states, a point he makes explicit in his work on popular contention in Great Britain (1995), where he traces the emergence of a new collective action repertoire. He demonstrates the shift from collective action repertoires that are local, particular, and direct to collective action repertoires that are cosmopolitan, modular, and indirect. Part of the explanation for the shift is the increasing importance of the role of nation states in organizing society. Thus, Tilly highlights the historically specific nature of repertoires of contention.

Building on Tilly's work, in *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency* (1999 [1982]) Doug McAdam explicitly lays out a political process model of social movements. In his original formulation, he identified three sets of factors that are critical to the generation of social movements. First, and most importantly, McAdam highlights the paramount role of political opportunities in accounting for social movement emergence. Whether or not groups can take advantage of these political openings depends upon the existence of indigenous organization and cognitive liberation. Thus, McAdam draws attention to the national political opportunities and the mobilization of existing

organizations. In other words, he is less concerned with the building of indigenous organizations, but rather focuses his attention on the mobilization of pre-existing organizations such as the African American Churches of the Civil Rights Movement.

As is well known, McAdam (1996) later refined the model in an article with McCarthy and Zald in which they reconceptualized two of the variables—indigenous organization and cognitive liberation. Indigenous organization was reformulated as “mobilizing structures” thus making explicit the emphasis on the activation of existing formal and informal organization for social movements trajectories. Following the work of David Snow and his collaborators (1986, 1988), cognitive liberation was reinterpreted as “framing.” But even with these changes, McAdam continued to privilege political opportunity structures as the *sin qua non* of social movements analysis, especially of explanation for social movements emergence. The legacy of Tilly and McAdam’s work has been the overwhelming emphasis in social movements scholarship on the state (i.e. how institutionalized political forces shape movements) and on mobilization processes (i.e. the use of existing organizations rather than the construction of new organizations). This emphasis reflects the increasing power of nation states in the 19th and 20th centuries, which led to the theoretical emphasis on how movements could secure concessions and rights from the powerful nation state.

While certainly capturing important dimensions of movements over the last two centuries, political process models have come under fierce criticism from activists and community organizers for their relative neglect of locally based, grassroots movements and for ignoring questions about how individuals and organizations gain the capacity to act. Political process scholarship’s focus on the state led it to overlook important questions of agency (Flacks 2004) and locally based initiatives (Warren 2001). The scholarly emphasis on

social movements has also been narrowly focused on high profile (usually national) events that often attract media attention, but has paid less attention to low profile, day-to-day efforts that are community-based yet also seek long-term transformation. Community organizers, by contrast, focus their activities on a range of institutions in civil society and are largely interested in questions of how individuals and communities gain the capacity to act (Wood 2002; Warren 2001). Moreover, in contrast to the high profile events covered by social movement scholarship, community organizing focuses on building local movements, on low-profile efforts to build mobilizing structures, and ensuring the victories won are actually implemented (Polletta; 2003). In other words, community organizing attempts to build the type of enduring organizations that seek long-term transformation within communities. Regrettably, however, political process theorists have not paid much attention to the contribution of scholarship on community organizing.

Many social movement scholars also challenge the state-centered focus of the political process model. Recent critiques highlight the myriad ways in which the state-centrism of the political process model marginalizes culture and identity (see for example Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Buechler 2000; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Polletta 1999, 2006; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Earlier critiques –particularly those put forward by “new social movement” scholars (see for example Kitschelt 1990, Melucci 1988, 1996, Offe 1985, Routledge 2002, Touraine 1981)— emphasize the neglect of social cleavages that generate new identities and types of movements. But neither the recent critics nor the new social movements scholars explore how local groups build new capacities for social transformation. Yet, as we will show, it is the building of new collective capacities that is increasingly important today.

Charles Payne's discussion of the Civil Rights movement shifts our focus away from political process's emphasis on mobilizing existing structures to the creation of new collective capacities to act (i.e. organizing). Payne uncovers an alternative history of the Civil Rights movement that certainly recognizes the role of political opportunities, but does not accord them as dominant a role as the political process theorists. Payne's rendition is highly critical of political process scholars' overwhelming emphasis on mobilization as his work demonstrates that civil rights activism in Mississippi was not primarily a matter of forging pre-existing organizations like the black church into movement structures that could then be used as protest events that could garner national level attention but was instead integrally linked to the painstaking work of building local capacity, leadership, and organization. Especially in rural Mississippi, the harsh repression used to sustain racial domination ruthlessly restricted all forms of civic life. Thus, generating collective vehicles for grassroots groups to contest racial discrimination was the key task for movement activists, and their success at building these organizations contributed as much to the movement's victories as the large protests that pushed the federal government to give full citizenship rights to African Americans.

For our purposes, Payne demonstrates the existence of organizing in earlier movements, but also shows the difficulty in sustaining such movements especially in an era in which mass mobilizing was able to win important victories from the state. Payne's careful depiction of the day-to-day activities of the movement such as the creation of alternative schools (e.g., the Freedom Schools) and an alternative democratic party (e.g., the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party) can be seen as part of a larger effort to build new institutions in civil society. The effect of this was twofold: it helped create the capacity in individuals to act

as empowered citizens as well as helped create organization that could challenge the existing system. Payne's focus on the actual activities of movement actors in creating new institutions resonates with some of the recent movement activities and thus provides a preliminary sketch of the direction our theories of social movements should turn.

Civil Society as an Arena of Contestation

Before we discuss the shifts in movement practices, we must qualify our use of the concept of civil society as it may be controversial given that the term has been widely criticized because scholars and political actors of every ideological hue have used it in contradictory ways, thus draining it of analytical coherence (see for example, Chatterjee 2000, 2004; Harriss, Stokke, Tornquist 2004). For example, civil society has simultaneously been used to propagate intolerance, violence, and destruction in the Balkans, West Africa and the Indian subcontinent, to promote local empowerment and democratic politics in Brazil and Kerala, and to bypass state institutions in efforts to find markets in local spaces. We see civil society as a relational concept. For us, civil society consists of the range of institutions that lie between and intersect with both the state and economy such as trade unions, political parties, educational institutions, community organizations, social movements, and voluntary associations.

This understanding of civil society derives from the modern use of the term, although its origins lie in seventeenth and eighteenth century thought. Originally, civil society referred to a rule-governed society in which the public good comes before the ruler's private interests, but was later refined through the idea of a social contract, the rise of individual rights, and the assumption of human equality (Kaldor, 2003:6). Hegel took the idea further and

distinguished civil society from the state by defining it as “the realm of difference, intermediate between the family and the state” (1996, 185-6, quoted in Kaldor, 2003: 7). In the 20th century, Gramsci further refined civil society to refer to forms of social interaction that are distinct from both the state and economy. Thus, following in the tradition that sees civil society as a range of institutions that are distinct from, but connected to, the state and economy, we argue that social movements are located in civil society and are partially shaped by the relations among these three domains.

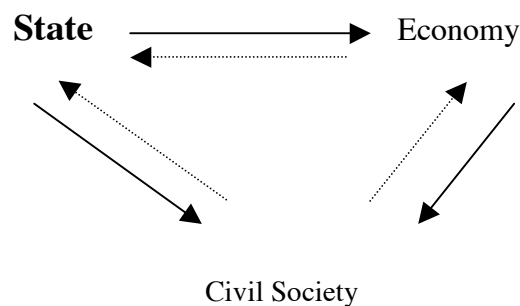
Building on Gramsci’s (1992) insight that the state organizes consent through its interaction with civil society and Polanyi’s (1945) contribution that shows society’s capacity to challenge the deleterious effects of a market economy, civil society has two dimensions for us. It is both a domain of social organization and is also an arena of contestation and generative practices made up of concrete organizations. As an arena of contestation and generative practices, civil society consists of discrete organizations between the state and economy where daily life is lived out and includes a multitude of publics each with their own vision and interests. We contend that since civil society is a space in which daily life is experienced, it offers tremendous space to challenge the penetration of the market into this domain and hence helps clarify the shift in movement practices. The 21st century shift in the relationship among the state, economy, and civil society, therefore, affects the *efficacy* and *form* of social movements.

Changing Relations among Civil Society, the State, and Economy

Payne’s focus on civil society is especially instructive in an era—like ours today—in which the balance of power among the domains of social organization is shifting. We can

conceive of society as composed of three domains—the state, economy and civil society with different configurations of relations among the three producing different types of societies, varying over time and across countries. For example, as Tilly has argued, over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries there was a marked increase in organization and power among all three arenas, but ultimately the balance shifted in favor of the state. (See Figure A.) This was true in the West where the capitalist form of social organization subordinated civil society to the state and the Soviet bloc where socialist state wielded power over civil society and the economy (Wright and Burawoy 2004: 3-4). The 20th century configuration corresponded to social movement practices emphasizing mobilization in which the primary target was the dominant state.

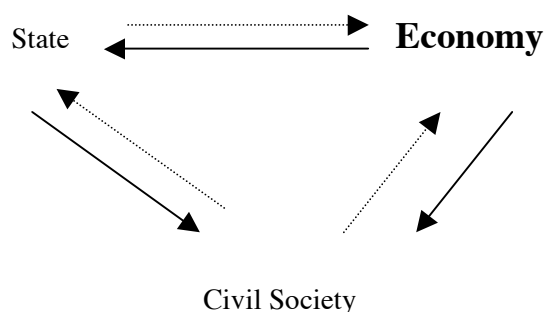
Figure A: Relations among State, Economy, and Civil Society in the 19th and 20th Centuries



As the 20th century drew to an end, the dominant state has been consistently challenged, leading it to retreat from many of its previous roles of providing social welfare to its citizens. By the dawn of the 21st century, the power of the economic domain had grown (i.e. increasing penetration of the market and trans-nationalizing production and finance), allowing it to penetrate the private sphere and social services to a greater extent. With this growing commodification of the commons, both the state and economy continue to dominate

although the balance has increasingly tilted toward the economic domain. Thus, over the course of the last three centuries civil society has been increasingly organized and strengthened, but has been consistently subordinated by first the state and now the market. (See Figure B.) To say that civil society is subordinated to the state and economy means that these domains affect the nature and character of civil society.

Figure B: Relations among State, Economy, and Civil Society in the 21st Centuries



Reflecting these changes in the balance of power in the three arenas, existing social movements have also been transformed. For example, Skocpol (2003) argues that in the last quarter of the 20th century US social movements lost their moorings in active member participation increasingly becoming advocacy organizations with an impoverished base of paper membership. For Skocpol the roots of this change are found in the emphasis of the 1960s generation of movements. While we agree with her analysis of the change from membership mobilization to managerial forms of civic organizing, we see the change arising not primarily from the nature of the earlier movements, but from the changes in the social arenas. For example, the rapid growth in transnational social movements corresponds with the retreat of the state in granting social welfare concessions. Moving across the Atlantic, scholars of Eastern Europe also point to the hollowing out of civil society over the course of

the 20th century, but trace this process to the monstrous powers of the Soviet state (Arato and Cohen 1994; Ferguson 2006). Here scholars highlight the minimal space available for any form of social movement activity.

What these renditions miss is that it is not just that civil society has withered and existing social movements have changed, but in recent years there has been a set of new movement practices emerging that are rooted in excluded, marginalized communities and seek to build efficacious citizens and civic organization through participatory organizing practices. This shift is also reflected in the issues taken up by transnational social movements. In 1963 transnational social movements focused the majority of their attention on issues of human rights (34%) and women's rights (11%) both of which lend themselves to state concessions. By 2003 these movements had broadened their focus to economic issues of development and global economic justice, and the global issue of the environment all of which registered growth (Smith 2008: 123).³ Unlike the pessimism found in much of the recent scholarship, these movements are both inspiring in their generative practices that attempt to build alternatives and are hopeful in their return to capacity building.

Shifts in Marco-Domains and Social Movement Practices

While social movements have a wide range of repertoires of practices, we have identified three broad categories of social movement practices: organizing, mobilizing, and networking.⁴ The three repertoires correspond to different levels of interaction: local,

³ The growth is in formal transnational social movements. There are a great deal (perhaps a majority) of movements that do not register on formal statistics, but also have shifted their focus to social justice, ecological issues, and livelihood strategies.

⁴ The political process theorists would argue that mobilizing incorporates networks. We have chosen to distinguish networks from mobilizing in order to capture the recent importance of transnational networks, which has received a great deal of scholarly attention.

national, and global. The main focus of organizing is building individual participation, civic engagement, and institutional capacity at the local level. The primary focus of mobilizing is protest action in an effort to get the state (and economic elite) to act in response to particular grievances. The emphasis in networking is creating linkages among activists at the global level in order to put pressure on international institutions acting in national and local spaces.

(See Figure C)

Figure C: Movement Practices

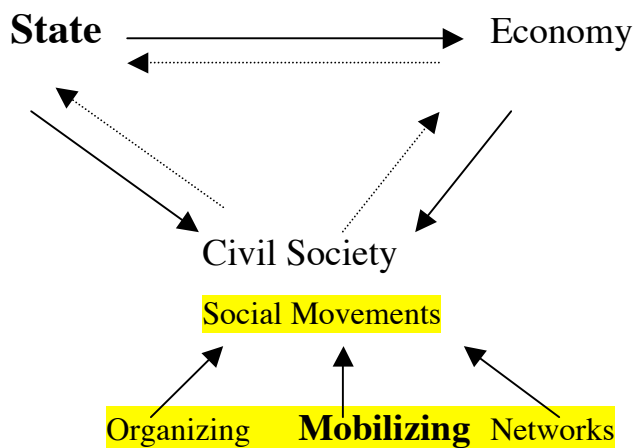
Movement Categories	Type of Practices	Level of Engagement
Organizing	Build capacity in civil society	Local level
Mobilizing	Build on existing organization	National level (especially state)
Networking	Build activist linkages	International level

All three types of movement practices have always existed and to some degree overlap with each other, but in the 20th century's configuration of state dominance mobilizing was the most efficacious. Hence, scholarship on social movements has focused on mobilizing. The shift in favor of the increasing role of the market has had profound implications as states have become less willing or able to play a positive social role. Reflecting these changes, recent scholarship looking at global movements has focused on networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998). There has been less attention on organizing, but as some movements have shown its efficacy is increasing with the retreat of the state and increasing power of the economic sphere. We suggest that many social movements today combine aspects of the social justice goals of the "old" movements in the political process model with the methods of the "new" movements focus on participatory organizing. What has gone largely unnoticed is the connection between these shifting repertoires and the shifting power relations among the state, economy,

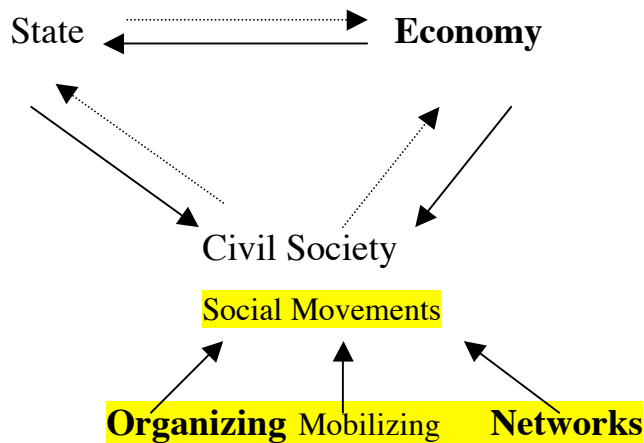
and civil society. (See Figures D and E) Thus, unlike Polanyi's double movement in which society rose up in order to get the state to respond to the ravages of the market, 21st century social movements are creating alternatives within their local spaces by engaging civil society more broadly.

Figure D: 19th and 20th Century Social Movement Practices

19th and 20th Century Social Movement Practices



21st Century Social Movement Practices



The challenge for social movements is clear, as a focus on large protests seeking state concessions is no longer as likely to yield the desired results as it once had. Many social movements around the world have understood the implications of this shift and have demonstrated that generative practices within civil society offer one of the most viable arenas for contesting market domination and state indifference. By generative practices we mean new forms of organizing that shift the focus of activists from oppositional politics that ultimately seek state concessions to local-level organizing that seek to build alternatives in and through new practices (Williams 2008). In this process there has been a renewed emphasis on the importance of participatory democracy that strengthens the role of ordinary citizens in making decisions that affect their lives. While this shift from focusing challenges against state actors in favor of developing alternatives in and through institutions in civil society has been one of the most important developments in recent movements, many analysts of transnational movements have overlooked its significance with their emphasis on international networks and linkages.

For example, there have been widely read studies about the importance of linkages between transnational non-governmental organizations (NGOs).⁵ The focus on this level of analysis is perhaps understandable considering the tremendous growth in the numbers of community based organizations involved in United Nations (UN) sponsored projects as well as the fact that transnational NGOs doubled between 1973 and 1983 and again between 1983 and 1993 (Sikkink and Smith, 2002:31). During the 1990s, the number of registered International NGOs (INGOs) rose again, from 10,292 to 13,206 with their membership

⁵ It is difficult to ascertain numbers for social movements as there is no central body that records their existence. As movements institutionalize and professionalize they often transform into NGOs for which there are many official bodies through which NGOs can register. Hence, most data available is for NGOs not social movements.

increasing from 155,000 to 263,000 (Global Civil Society, 2001 in Kaldor, 2003: 16). Taken together the number of INGOS and transnational social movement organizations show a steady increase in movement activity over the last decade of the 20th century. This massive growth in NGOs with international linkages reflects a renewed response from activists working at the grassroots. While the old relations among the three domains continue to be in flux, groups in civil society have increasingly challenged the subordination of civil society by either the state or economy through mounting challenges and building alternatives at both the local and global levels. Our old theories of social movements do not capture much of this new dynamism because of the dominance of the political opportunity lens that was a response to an era of state dominance. This forces us to question some of the basic tenets of our old theories and begin formulating new ones.

We turn to two cases to illustrate some of the efforts to build civil society and create capacity to act politically. To be clear, we are not suggesting that the focus on community organizing by many social movements is a theoretically driven choice by movement activists. Rather we are suggesting that movement activists are responding to changing conditions in the world today by carefully building and using new organizational structures grounded in relationships among and between previously unorganized people. For some movements creating alternative institutions is both a tactic and a goal (e.g., participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, decentralized planning in Kerala, India), while for others it is primarily a tactic used to achieve goals (e.g., labor movements in Korea and the US; see Chun forthcoming). The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) is one example of a movement that has emphasized the importance of building grassroots organization with collective capacity to challenge the dominant economic and political power relations on the land. The MST

exemplifies the importance of constructing organization and in nurturing links between civil society and political institutions. Our second example moves to the global north, looking at the Justice for Janitors struggle that began in Los Angeles, California in the 1990s. This case also illustrates the important terrain of civil society as well as the role of community organizing in recent social movements. We have chosen these two examples for their illustrative capacity. We are not offering comprehensive studies of either movement, but rather use the examples to draw lessons for social movements theorizing.

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement

The Landless Workers Movement officially began in 1984 in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost state in Brazil, as an effort by landless workers to organize themselves to collectively fight for the use and ownership of unproductive land. While 1984 is its official founding, its genesis can be dated back to December 1979 when a group of farm workers staked out a piece of land and built the Natalino encampment (officially named Encruzilhada Natalino). In these early days the farm workers had no idea (or aspiration) that their actions were to give birth to a movement for landless workers across the country. MST's originality, however, is not in its spectacular growth but in the novel ways in which it has built organizational capacity based on participatory organizing and how it has ensured that ordinary people have remained the key actors, even in the face of tremendous growth and impressive success. From its earliest days the MST placed priority on building sustainable democratic mechanisms within the organization itself as well as on empowering ordinary citizens to act and speak on their own behalf (Christofolli, 2006a). The ways in which it pursues these twin goals is through its day-to-day practices in the encampments and by actively creating an

“imagined community” (Wolford 2003b). The MST’s emphasis on organizing, we suggest, reflects one movement’s attempt to respond to the shifting balance of power in the domains of social organization. While the movement began in the mid-1980s, the twin developments of the 1988 constitution (which included a provision for reclaiming unproductive land) and the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s shifted the playing field on which the MST operated and consequently affected its practices. On the one hand, the constitutional provision created space for legal claims to the land while, on the other hand, the structural adjustment programs reduced the role of the state. Thus, the MST has worked within the conditions created by the shifting terrain.

The novelty of the MST lies in (1) its focus on building the collective capacity of landless workers by participatory organizing at the local level and (2) its broader effort to turn the communities into a web of sustainable alternatives thus relying on civil society for its strength rather than on mounting challenges directly at the state. By emphasizing organizing rather than mass mobilizing, the MST insists on the importance of farmers organizing themselves through every stage of the land occupation (e.g., raising funds from within their communities, collective decision making, developing alternative schools for the children). This process of building self reliance is an attempt to break the traditional patterns of paternalism omnipresent in Brazilian rural society. But the emphasis on self-reliance goes beyond breaking past traditions, as it is a generative process of constructing the alternative through day-to-day practices and thus requires the organization to develop participatory organizing practices that extend beyond the MST into the newly-formed communities. Like many social movements, the MST does not rely solely on one type of practices (Jose, 2008). While it prioritizes participatory organizing, it continues to engage high profile mass

mobilizing events to help shore up widespread support and symbolically demonstrate its strength. Indeed, the MST has ingeniously used spaces created by the state by drawing on “symbolic and material relationships between people and their environments” (Wolford 2003a: 207). The MST came to its radically democratic practices through a range of influences such as socially minded priests schooled in liberation theology and progressive government officials (Christofolli, 2006a). While pre-existing organizations influenced the MST, the movement activists have built the organization through explicitly constructing alternative institutions in civil society by building on local norms and practices (Wolford 2003a: 210). Thus, the MST has actively engendered an “imagined community” that frames the movement as an effort to build an alternative grounded in group norms and expectations (Wolford, 2003b: 506).

The MST’s chief tactic is clandestine land occupations in the middle of the night. The MST pries open opportunities as farmers furtively identify land and then methodically organize themselves for the eventual occupation. All the land occupations begin with months of legwork, and with local activists discussing the situation with farmers and informing them of their constitutional right to take over large unproductive land (Christofolli, 2006a). After extended discussions and education about their legal rights, the farmers collectively decide whether or not to invade identified land. Intensive planning goes into each land seizure, and the MST insists that the whole process must be led and implemented by the farmers themselves (Jaque, 2008). The farmers raise their own money to buy food, rent trucks, and finance the take-over (Stedile, 2004: 23-4).

Following the occupations, the farmers and their families set up self-reliant encampments many of which have evolved into fully-fledged communities with their own

schools, clinics, and grocery stores. Many of the MST-established communities have built local markets to sell locally produced agricultural goods, set up credit unions, and created farmers' cooperatives for credit and marketing assistance (Jose, 2008). Reflecting its commitment to learning and keeping up with the needs of farmers it has established research institutes that provide ongoing courses in ecology and agronomics as well as participatory leadership skills and training (Christofolli, 2006b). The MST's schools and training are based on Paulo Friere's pedagogy of action research and participatory learning. The movement is explicit in rejecting the tendency for experts, outsiders, political parties and unions to represent and speak on behalf of members and MST constituents (Christofolli, 2006a). For our purposes one of the important aspects of the MST experience is the tremendous emphasis placed on building collective organization and participatory mechanisms in civil society that sustain the movement over time. The MST has consistently focused on the importance of grassroots organizing in which no single individual leaders emerge, but rather collective leadership is continually reproduced. Thus, it links its local struggles for land with a larger struggle to build an alternative world through the process of local transformations in power relations (Stedile, 2004: 20). While the MST emphasizes self-reliance, it also realizes that it cannot accomplish its goals without nurturing alliances with other social movements, political parties, civic organizations, and the state (Jose, 2008). Thus, beyond its members, the MST has successfully gained widespread support from other farmers and people living in the region as well as the middle class living in the urban areas. Part of the MST's ability to forge broader linkages stems from its success at promoting a wide range of leadership and

from its ability to symbolically frame the struggle in ways that resonate as legitimate.⁶ In addition to local alliances, the MST has forged international solidarity and linkages. The international attention has been fortuitous, as it has made it difficult for the successive governments to simply repress the movement. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Brazilian government adopted structural adjustment programs that restricted the role of the state in agrarian transformation (Houtzager and Kurtz, 2000:403-406). The MST, however, has contested these developments to push the state to play an affirmative role in agrarian transformation by organizing in civil society rather than directly contesting the state. The deleterious effects of economic reform policies on Brazil's rural communities have helped the MST further broaden the struggle beyond land ownership to include wider economic and political issues (Stedile, 2004: 39). The MST has thus taken great effort to build organizational structures that are democratic and flexible and has developed a complex committee system operating within the encampments and communities that addresses various aspects of collective life (Christofolli, 2006b).

While the MST focuses its practices on building organization and capacity in civil society, it does not disregard the positive role the state can play. For example, in recent years the MST did not try to influence the Worker's Party's (PT) election program as it is not interested in making political deals with political parties. Rather it supports the Worker's Party because it agrees with a number of the PT's positions, which reflect the MST's strength in civil society (Jose 2008; Jaque 2008). Rather than seeking concessions from the state, in some regions the MST has transcended the old paradigm and has creatively engaged the state through mediating between the state and MST communities (Wolford, 2003b: 514) and by

⁶ The Brazilian Constitution stipulates that unproductive, fallow land can be redistributed, which provided a window of opportunity for the MST and helped it define the land occupations as legitimate.

fielding its own candidates and using elected positions to transform the local state government institutions. For instance, one of the impediments to local infrastructural development in some rural areas of Brazil is the fact that the rural municipal boundaries are too large with too many entrenched powerful people unwilling to pay attention to the needs of the newly founded MST communities. In response the MST, to take one example, successfully fought to create a new, smaller municipality of Pantão, which had formerly fallen under the large Passo Fundo municipality (Wright and Wolford, 2003: 82). The landless then elected their own representatives into the positions within the newly established Pantão Municipality and has used these elected positions to scale up their efforts to transform their communities into vibrant political spaces.

By the turn of the century 350,000 families (approximately four million people) have benefited from land redistributed through MST-led occupations that have been sustained through their efforts to generate new forms of civil society organizations similar to the ways in which organization was built in Payne's portrayal of the civil rights movement. In recent years the MST has also forged important relations with other organizations and extended its international networks. For example, it played a pivotal role in the formation of the World Social Forum and has extended its reach to include strong domestic and international alliances (e.g., it has strong ties to the solidarity organization, Via Campesina, and has started international schools training landless workers from other countries). The political process model of social movements scholarship does not help us to understand the dynamics of such a movement. Challenging the political process scholarship's focus on political opportunities, the MST is certainly cognizant of political opportunities but builds its strength by developing and nurturing democratic political practices in which all members can participate.

It is in the way in which the farmers organize themselves and in their collective vision—that the MST has worked hard to create—for an alternative social order that marks the MST apart. The courage, élan, and imagination of the MST led it to successfully challenge the subordination of civil society to the state and economy. It is not simply trying to win concessions from the state or economic elite, but is actively creating alternatives in its concrete actions at the grassroots and in this process reconfigures civil society's relations with the state and economy. We contend that the MST's combined focus on local organizing and transformative politics reflects the shifting configuration among the state, economy and civil society. The state is no longer the primary organizer of social life, but is increasingly challenged by both the economic domain as well as civil society.

Justice for Janitors Movement in the United States

The Justice for Janitors (J for J) campaigns in the United States similarly illustrates the important role of civil society and of intensive community organizing in recent successful social movements. Some social movement scholars may object to seeing a late 20th century labor campaign as a social movement, but it is in fact the campaign's movement qualities that have made it a successful campaign. The J for J campaign has begun to put the “move” back into America's labor movement.⁷

When the first important J for J campaign began in Los Angeles in 1988, it was a period of serious decline in the US labor movement, both generally and in the janitorial industry in particular. Unions had fallen on very hard times in the US, with density very low

⁷ This discussion draws on [reference removed]. Fuller accounts of Justice for Janitors campaigns in Los Angeles can also be found in Milkman 2006 and Waldinger et al. 1998. Studies of Justice for Janitors in other cities are Rudy 2004 and Chun 2005.

by historical standards, and with many of the union member who remained mired in a type of unionism that bore little resemblance to its social movement past. The Los Angeles janitorial industry was a case in point. Battered by decades of contracting out, declining state regulation, and war-related immigration, the industry's workforce was composed largely of very poorly-paid, undocumented, and highly fragmented immigrant workers. Most union officials and political leaders wrote these workers off as "unorganizable." The immigrant workers were thought to view their situation in relation to their home countries, where conditions were even worse than in Los Angeles, and, since they were vulnerable to deportation, they were assumed to be too fearful to risk confronting authorities. Moreover, while almost all the undocumented immigrants in Los Angeles were Latino, they felt little affinity for each other as they came from different countries, including Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Adding to the belief that they were unorganizable was that fact that janitors worked alone at night, so the workplace itself presented few organizational building blocks. The general view of most union and political leaders was that the janitors had very little collective capacity. Indeed, these leaders had a working theory of collective action that resembles the political process model: since there were few obvious pre-existing organizations to mobilize, the janitors -- despite their grievances -- were seen as having little potential as collective actors.

This changed when in a bold move, a small group of activists from the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) set out to organize the Los Angeles janitors. Some of these activists were veterans of the progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and

others were experienced community organizers.⁸ Their working model of social movements was closer to that of the SNCC activists analyzed by Payne than to the dominant political process model. They began intensive organizing, identifying and training rank-and-file leaders and building up commitment through disruptive, nonviolent direct action. They framed the janitor's struggle in moral terms, looking for allies in civil society rather than trying to win concessions—like union recognition—from the state. For example, they designed demonstrations to bring the city's poorest workers into direct contact with the affluent world of the corporate tycoons who owned and rented the office buildings. One protest, for example, took place at an exclusive social club frequented by the owner of a large cleaning company, where the workers chanted and carried signs that publicized the poverty wages they received for cleaning up after rich CEOs and their well-paid lawyers. Actions like this represented public “shaming rituals” that built community support by underscoring the injustice of the poverty wages of the janitors in relation to the ostentatious wealth of the building inhabitants.

At first, the demonstrations were deliberately calculated to maximize media coverage while minimizing risks to workers; and only later did organizers ask workers to engage in actions that might expose them to the possibility of arrest or losing their jobs. After building worker confidence, the J for J activists escalated the conflict by encouraging workers to engage in ever riskier acts of civil disobedience, such as blocking traffic, engaging in sit-ins in the lobby of buildings, and disrupting sensitive business meetings by barging in, chanting loudly, and tossing bags of trash. Eventually, the janitors decided that the only way they could

⁸Some labor movement scholars and activists have criticized the Justice for Janitors campaigns because it was innovated and initiated by activists on the staff of the union, rather than being initiated by the rank and file. We think the important point is that the SEIU activists set out to really organize the janitors rather than mobilizing them.

win a better life was by going on strike, a high-stakes decision given the janitors' (il)legal status. From that moment on, the pace of the campaign quickened. There were marches every day, mostly involving people with signs parading along the median strip and tying up traffic. There were also bigger events, involving workers and community people, often several hundred, marching through the struck buildings, demanding justice for the janitors. (Indeed, community supporters soon formed their own organization – Solidarity with Justice for Janitors.) Tensions quickly mounted and the police began to preemptively arrest people taking part in peaceful demonstrations, citing their “suspicion” that people planned to block doors and traffic. (In other words, the police didn't wait for people to actually block doorways or traffic; they simply arrested them on the suspicion that they might.) The resulting arrests brought a great deal of publicity, and more support for the janitors.

The strike was eventually won after three weeks of daily marches, when the police attacked the unarmed, peaceful demonstrators, and in front of TV cameras, seriously wounded several people, including a pregnant woman who suffered a miscarriage. Widespread condemnation of the police action followed, and both the LA mayor and unions representing janitors in other cities began to pressure building contractors to settle the strike. The strike was eventually settled, with a clear-cut victory for the janitors. Within a remarkably short time, 90% of the janitors who cleaned LA's major high rises were unionized.

It was a remarkable victory, one that relied fundamentally on the intensive organizing of a disparate group of very poorly paid, illegal immigrants. Once organized, the immigrant janitors proved to be quite militant, capable of quickly marshalling support not only among their fellow janitors but also from among family, friends, and neighbors. Over the course of the campaign, the union activists who had originally set out to organize the janitors, often

using techniques borrowed from the repertoire of community organizers, were amazed at the janitors' willingness to overtake the activists in their intensity and commitment.

The janitor's victory breathed new life into the Los Angeles central labor council, which subsequently served as the civic engine of an unprecedented Latino political mobilization in Los Angeles. In the past the central labor council was like most other central labor councils in modern-day America, dominated by conservative building trade unions and doing little to cultivate solidarity across trade and ethnic lines, or to build political power for poor workers. But the LA central labor council became one of the most important forces in southern California politics. Since the mid-1990s, the janitors have been the most active group to mobilize their fellow citizens behind progressive initiatives and candidates, including the first ever Latino mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa, elected in 2005. In addition, they have been at the forefront of the amnesty movement for undocumented immigrant workers.

Moreover, new solidarities and movement organizations have been created as a result of the J for J campaign in Los Angeles. In 2000, janitors launched a second strike that drew even broader support than the 1990 strike. A broad group of community activists, religious leaders, and politicians were arrested for civil disobedience in support of the strike. Unions like the Teamsters and Operating Engineers that had never before shown solidarity with unskilled workers at the bottom of the labor market, engaged in solidarity actions. After only 17 days the janitors were victorious against the largest contractors of building services in America.

In the years since the janitors of Los Angeles won their first strike, J for J campaigns have been launched in 28 cities around the United States, and over 200,000 building service workers are now members of J for J locals. In 2006, using the same kind of intensive

community organizing tactics and headline-grabbing direct action that proved successful in Los Angeles, SEIU organized janitors citywide in Houston, Texas, a place that epitomizes the right-to-work South (Lerner 2007; Greenhouse 2008). Moreover, J for J activists have increasingly come to frame their struggle as one of global justice. In June 2005, SEIU organized a Global Day for Justice, and organized demonstrations at British consulates in the U.S., Germany, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and South Africa to support the mostly immigrant workers who clean the British Parliament's House of Commons in London while barely eking out a living on the wages they make.

Like the MST, the Justice for Janitors campaigns has achieved great success not by targeting and winning concessions from the state, but by constructing new capacities in civil society. Unlike the MST, the J for J did not seek to build alternative communities in civil society. Rather J for J has creatively used new capacities in civil society to challenge the economic domain. In the late 1980s when the J for J campaign began in Los Angeles, the idea that poor, undocumented cleaners, working alone at night, might forge a grass-roots organization formidable enough to transform the political field of southern California and initiate a Global Day of Justice for janitors across the globe would have seemed absurd. But that is what has been accomplished.

Conclusion

The dominant political process model of collective action neglects the importance of participatory organizing and capacity building for modern social movements. This neglect threatens to make our theories less and less relevant as the larger terrain within which social movements operate is being reconfigured. In the political process model, the state is the

central actor and thus movement emergence, dynamics, and outcomes are fundamentally shaped by state action. In the 21st century configuration, the economy's power in relation to the state and civil society has increased, while the state's capacity to grant concessions has diminished. This, ironically, has enhanced the potential importance of participatory organizing in civil society in interactions with the state and economy.

Where the new movements dramatically challenge the political process model is in their emphasis on building organizations capable of extending democratic civil society rather than relying on pre-existing mobilizing structures that are turning out protesters in order to pressure the state. Building on Payne's distinction between organizing and mobilizing, we see the new movements as diverging from the old in their primary focus on using participatory organizing in civil society in order to enable them to interact with the state and economy, rather than the political process model's emphasis on political opportunities. Social movement scholarship has neglected this reconfiguration of civil society perhaps because these local practices fall under the radar screen of a theory that places paramount emphasis on large protest movements. Scholars who have applied political process models to the global arena have focused on the international aspirations of local movements, but have also failed to capture the local community organizing where civil society is developed.

The MST and J for J are two movements that have responded to the changing conditions in novel ways. Both illustrate the importance of community organizing and (re)building civil society. Thus, we suggest here that globalization has affected these movements not so much by providing new global opportunity structures, as many have claimed, but instead by leaving civil society as the most viable domain for mounting challenges and constructing alternatives. In each example we see activists turn to community

organizing and civil society. Indeed, some of the most powerful aspects of these movements are the local democratic practices forged and the new institutions created, and not simply victories measured in terms of goals achieved or concessions won.

Much like the thinking of early 20th century theorists such as Gramsci and Polanyi who theorized the emergence of civil society as a response to the growth of the state and market forces, we are theorizing the renewed important role of civil society as a response to the shift in the macro domains. We believe that it is paramount for social movements scholars to further theorize how to build organizations that help empower citizens to become active participants in the economic, political, and social domains of life.

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