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## BETWEEN SOCIAL CONTROL AND CONFLICT: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

**Abstract.** The main goal of this article is to attempt to determine the analytical framework of social movements that would constitute an essential element of this form of collective activity. In order to identify this element (or elements) I will review the four main approaches to the study of social movements, which allows me to settle the issue in sociological conflict tradition. From the point of view of the outlined objective, Alain Touraine's approach will be a key perspective.

**Keywords:** social movements; social conflict, social control, historicity.

### 1. Introduction

For at least four decades the category of social movements has constituted an important element of reflection of social sciences on – generally speaking – the phenomenon of collective action. A number of theoretical and empirical studies exploring the role of contesting movements in various spheres of social life have been conducted, nevertheless, not even a broad and yet universal basis for defining the concept itself has been developed. It is a consequence of more than just profound discrepancies at the level of theoretical and methodological orientations between various social disciplines or within one and the same discipline. The very dialectical nature of social movements, which, *ex definitione*, are characterized by unstructured and changeable criteria of participation, which are built on various types of conflict and different methods of conceptualization of collective identity, using varied tactics of action, constitutes an enormous theoretical challenge (see: Tilly 2004). For this reason Alberto Melucci (1996) emphasizes the fact that social movements (an in particular the so-called “new” social movements) should first and foremost be investigated at the analytical level, rather than the empirical

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level, which is the case in practically oriented approaches. The present text responds to this postulate, making an attempt at placing the issues of social movements in the tradition of sociology of conflict (M a r t i n 1977), which is supposed to help redefine a number of categories and concepts currently used for the conceptualization and operationalization of the area in which social movements function (along with vast social, political, economic and cultural consequences) (B e r n a r d 1950).

When expressing an aspiration to determine even a general analytical framework for social movements, it is impossible to disregard the description of collective behaviors and actions, which constitute the basis of the reflection of social sciences within their broadest meaning. It is not just the matter of the ontological status of these collective activities in relation to e.g. social movements themselves, mass actions or organized actions, even though such intuitions, too, could help to structure the reality under consideration. What seems more important is an attempt to determine the nature of the said interpersonal relations, presented in a specific, be it dynamically changing, historical context. The said context both determines the method of conceptualization of the analytical framework for social movements, and has an impact on the shape and direction of the movements themselves. Right at the very beginning, the possibility to identify the universalistic, definitional determinants of a social movement, i.e. to specify the distinctive features of such an action outside the specific, historical conditions for its occurrence, is eliminated. This intuition may be expressed in a weaker version, emphasizing that a purely formal definition of social movements (distinguishing this form of collective action from others) makes sense as long as it is placed in a specific historical reality, predefining the meta-theoretical aspects of the social phenomenon under consideration.

## **2. Collective actions and social movements**

Neil S m e l s e r (1965: 8) defined collective behavior in a very general, be it pithy way, as “mobilization on the basis of a belief which redefines social action”. Therefore, what we are dealing with is social activity which undermines or – as Smelser puts it – reconstructs the established understanding of a social action, which encompasses: a) values, or general sources of legitimacy; b) norms, or regulatory standards for interaction; c) mobilization of individual motivation for organized action in roles and collectivities; d) situational facilities, or information, skills, tools, and obstacles in the pursuit of concrete goals (S m e l s e r (1965: 9). The specificity of a collective action, while constituting the basis for the functioning of the society (as well as smaller social structures), is characterized by specific interrelations which, changeable as they are, may be classified into certain



categories – at least conceptually<sup>1</sup>. Alain Touraine, for instance, suggested distinguishing four areas constituting the key interest of sociology which could help in the differentiation of collective actions.

Let us begin with a description (horizontal in the Table 1) of the relationship between the society and the environment, which, in fact, constitutes an interest in the “formal” mechanisms of social life, which include “the legislator, the government, the managing director, than prisoners, minorities, or wage earners” (Touraine 1977: 33). In the context of collective behaviors and actions, this form of shaping the society, related to functions (strongly correlated with social roles, since “the conduct of the actor legitimately expected by his partner in a specific social activity” (Touraine 1977: 34)) and decisions (focused on “relations of «influence», to the actor’s comparative capacity to modify the behavior of his partner or to be modified by him as to his own behavior” (Touraine 1977)), is a derivative of institutionalized practices.

**Table 1.** Four basic orientations of sociology

	Order	Movement
Interactions of society with environment	functions	decisions
Internal social relations	controls	actions

Source: Touraine 1977: 33.

The so-called internal social relations, on the other hand, “tend to look more for the hidden forces within society, are mistrustful of its discourse and rationality in which they think they detect the domination of an ideology, a mixture of integration and repression” (Touraine 1977). This very level, based on actions which, according to Alain Touraine, are related to structural conflicts (e.g. class conflicts), as well as control, which takes seriously the phenomenon of alienation, that is “the contradiction between the dominated actor’s conduct corresponding to his situation and the conduct imposed upon him by institutions and socialization in the service of the ruling order” (Touraine 1977: 35), constitutes the grounds for the crystallization of defying collective behaviors. It goes without saying that it

<sup>1</sup> Smelser’s value-added model of collective behavior distinguishes six stages, including: „a) structural conduciveness, i.e. a certain configuration of social structure that may facilitate or constrain the emergence of specific types of collective behavior; b) structural strain, i.e. the fact that at least some trait of the social system is experienced by a collectivity as a source of tension and problems; c) growth and spread of generalized belief, i.e. the emergence of a shared interpretation by social actors of their situation and problems; d) precipitating factors, i.e. stressful events that induce actors to take action; e) mobilization, i.e. the network and organizational activities that transform potential for action into real action; f) operation of social control, i.e. the role of social control agencies and other actors in shaping the evolution of collective behavior and its forms” (Della Porta, Diani 2006: 7).



is not a trivial and routine process, since, first of all, there exist different and intersecting interrelations, even at the order-movement level (vertical section of the Table 1), which place social control in a completely different context. Second of all, what – for the lack of a better term – has been described above as the “formal” mechanisms of social life should be defined as a specifically understood game, “taking many different and sophisticated forms, in order ultimately to produce and reproduce the existing reality, not just at the economic or political levels, but also at the cultural level” (Baranowski 2012: 9). In practice, it has a negative impact on the establishment and separation of social movements from a wide range of collective activities (an in particular – actions), for it is obvious that not every collective action is a social movement.

**Table 2.** Forms of collective activity

	Multitude of actions with individual goals	Spatial and situational proximity	Common goals' and coordination	Focus on social change	Institutionalization
Mass actions	+				
Collective behaviors	+	+			
Collective actions		+	+		
Social movements		+	+	+	
Organized actions	+	+	+		+

Source: Sztompka 2007: 173.

Table 2 presents a breakdown of particular types of collective activity, which, even though they are used interchangeably in everyday language, have a well-established meaning in sociology. First of all, social movements are different from collective behaviors or actions in that they are focused on social change, and thus on “blowing up” a given social reality. This can be expressed differently, emphasizing that social movements have a specific revolutionary potential, capable of bringing about “a change in the system” or even “changing the system”. Moreover, social movements are a non-institutionalized form of collective activity, which, in turn, sets them apart from organized actions and has further consequences. For the strength of social movements lies precisely in the lack of formal criteria of participation, as a result of which movements are/can be supported by very diverse and broad categories of participants. At the same time, when it comes to “negotiations”, “laying down the terms” of social change, their bargaining power is insignificant, therefore, in order to actually change the social reality, social movements are often formalized (institutionalized), and thus lose the said broad support base.



### 3. Four approaches in the research on social movements

According to H.-A. Van der Heijden (2010: 18), a Dutch researcher, four main perspectives can be distinguished in the research on social movements, namely: a) the New Social Movements approach, b) the Resource Mobilization approach, c) the Political Opportunity Structure approach and d) the Social-constructivist approach.

Each of the above-mentioned approaches is characterized by a specific form of conceptualization of social movements, while emphasizing a different set of determinants denoting the said phenomenon of collective activity. When attempting to define the analytical framework for social movements, it is worth taking a closer look at the said standpoints.

The separation of the “new” forms from the theoretically established social movements is associated with the late 60’s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is when movements dedicated to the environment, women’s issues, peace, civic affairs, students, the third world (Van der Heijden 2010: 19), as well as an alternative community production and distribution of goods and services (Offe 1985) and “urban social struggles” (Boggs 1986: 39–40) first came into being and started to grow in power – especially in developed countries. What H.-A. Van der Heijden (2010: 19) sees as the basis for articulating the need for a change in the said areas, is the structural transformation associated with

the emergence of the welfare state and the gradual disappearance of poverty; the transition from an industrial into a post-industrial society; the declining relevance of class contradictions and class conflict; a steadily increasing level of education; the emergence of mass consumerism and the “consumer society”; and, finally, the advent of television.

**Table 3.** The main characteristics of the “old” and “new” paradigms of politics

	“old paradigm”	“new paradigm”
Actors	socioeconomic groups acting as groups (in the groups’ interest) and involved in distributive conflict	socioeconomic groups acting not as such, but on behalf of ascriptive collectivities
Issues	economic growth and distribution; military and social security, social control	preservation of peace, environment, human rights, and unalienated forms of work
Values	freedom and security of private consumption and material progress	personal autonomy and identity, as opposed to centralized control etc.
Modes of action	a) internal: formal organization, large-scale representative associations b) external: pluralist or corporatist interest intermediation; political party competition, majority rule	a) internal: informality, spontaneity, low degree of horizontal and vertical differentiation b) external: protest politics based on demands formulated in predominantly negative terms

Source: Offe 1985: 832.



All these elements in a way transformed – and in fact this process is still continuing – the social reality, ensuring that the classically-understood social movements did not overlap with the semantic scope of these “new” forms of collective activity. The social base (i.e. the actors), the questions raised, the values adopted and the very method of action (see Table 3) make one realize the profound difference between the new social movements and their classical counterparts, which can still be found. However, one should keep in mind the fact that the empirical examples of modern social movements cannot be easily classified into “old” and “new”, since material world is simply richer than the theoretical attempts at its presentation. Lorna Weir even believes that

the thesis that contemporary social movements are qualitatively different from social movements arising around the early to mid-nineteenth century in the West has been demonstrated to have little credibility. NSM theorists have been shown to subscribe, paradoxically, to an orthodox, class reductionist version of social movement history, resisting this interpretation only for the contemporary period; they thereby create a false dichotomy between social movements before and after World War II (Weir 1993: 96).

When it comes to the resource mobilization approach, which can be defined as “the social-scientific counterpart of the West European NSM approach” (Van der Heijden 2010: 21), it should first and foremost be emphasized that

social movements are an extension of politics and may be analyzed in terms of the conflict of interest, just as other forms of political struggle. Moreover, they are believed to be structured and patterned, and therefore they may be analyzed in terms of organizational dynamics, just as other forms of institutionalized action (Buechler 2008: 44).

This, in turn – contrary to Smelser’s approach quoted above – places social movements in a completely different socio-political context, since

the resource mobilization theory sees social movements as ordinary, rational, institutionally rooted political forms of opposition (political challenges) of dissatisfied groups. Thus, the boundary between conventional politics and social movements is blurred, but does not disappear completely (Buechler 2008).

The condition of being “institutionally rooted”, mentioned by Buechler, is of great importance here, since it is the so-called social movement organizations that play the key role. They can be defined as “complex, or formal, organizations which identify their goals with the preferences of a social movement or countermovement and attempt to implement those goals. So a social movement, for instance, the environmental movement, typically includes a large number of SMOs” (Van der Heijden 2010: 21). By crossing two variables (target of mobilization, and organizational form) we arrive at the typology of SMOs (Table 4).



**Table 4.** A typology of social movement organizations

	Hierarchical structure	Horizontal structure
Professional resources	public interest lobby	professional pressure group
Participatory resources	participatory pressure group	grassroots group

Source: Van der Heijden 2010: 22.

James M. Jasper (2004: 2) interprets the approach under consideration in a more unambiguous context of conflict:

The most strategic approach to social movements came in the first flowering of resource-mobilization theory, with Oberschall's efforts to place movements in the broader context of conflict. With this frame, he could highlight the interaction between insurgents and their opponents, especially processes such as polarization. The mobilization of resources and formation of alliances are key strategic activities.

Moving on to the next approach, I will begin by characterizing its key issue – political opportunity structures, providing a definition of which will be crucial for understanding the entire perspective. And so, according to H. P. Kitschelt (1986: 58) political opportunity structures are

comprised of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others. While they do not determine the course of social movements completely, careful comparisons among them can explain a good deal about the variations among social movements with similar demands in different settings, if other determinants are held constant. Comparison can show that political opportunity structures influence the choice of protest strategies and the impact of social movements on their environments.

The term “structure of political opportunities” was used for the first time by Peter Eisinger in 1973 to “help account for variation in riot behavior in forty-three American cities. [He; M. B.] found that the incidence of protest was closely related to the nature of city's POS, which he defined as «the degree to which groups are likely to be able to gain access to power and to manipulate the political system»” (Van der Heijden 2010: 23). But in fact this approach has become popular among i.a. political scientists and sociologists for the matter of being applied to the analysis of the state (e.g. Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995).

The fourth research perspective, i.e. the social-constructivist approach:

deals with the way social problems, their causes as well as their solutions, are defined by social movements. Its starting point is the cognitive approach to social movements (Eyerman, Jamison 1991).

According to this approach, the key feature of a social movement is not its material success but its “cognitive praxis”. A social movement is primarily seen as a producer of knowledge; by framing an issue in a “counter-hegemonic” way, by developing a point of view that



challenges the dominant discourse, it points to alternative ways of modeling society (Van der Heijden 2010: 26).

A more precise description of this approach, which includes a number of interesting conceptual proposal, can be found in the following passage:

Social-constructionist orientations in social movements are broadly organized around four concepts: framing, identity, culture and emotions. The practitioners within each tradition are working on different central problems with different core insights and methodologies. Social psychological perspectives that examine how individuals make meanings in social contexts work differently from cultural perspectives that examine how meanings are made at a societal level. Social psychological and cultural perspectives are present to varying degrees in work organized around each of these concepts, and a failure to distinguish the social psychological and cultural levels of analysis has contributed to some confusion in all of them (Oliver, Cadenaro, Strawn 2003: 227).

#### 4. Suggested definition of social movements

According to previously cited Alain Touraine (1977: 298) social movement is “the conflict action of agents of the social classes struggling for control of the system of historical action”, which – contrary to the political-science take on the matter (see: Koopmans 2010: 344–345) – “are not a marginal rejection of order, they are the central forces lighting one against the other to control the production of society by itself and the action of classes for the shaping of historicity [i.e., the overall system of meaning which sets dominant rules in a given society]” (1981: 29 as cited in: Della Porta, Diani 2006: 8). Even though Alain Touraine remains under the influence of Marxist thought, his take on social movements or the very essence of social conflict is different from the approach of Marx himself (e.g. Marx 1904: 11–12). If we gave a careful consideration to the way in which the French scholar places the essence of social movements in the context of various types of conflict (Touraine 1985), we would arrive at a very well-articulated discrepancy between the approaches of Marx and Touraine. At this point, however, the discrepancy becomes less important, since the main purpose of the present article is to outline the analytical framework for social movements as such.

The presented overview of various approaches to the problem under consideration made it possible to particularize – at least in short – a specific take on the phenomenon of social movements, which distribute stress in a number of different ways, emphasizing those features of the said form of collective activity, which actually cannot be reduced to a common denominator, along with its research methodologies. On the one hand, it is symptomatic of multi-paradigm



social sciences, which – through various theoretical and methodological orientations – conceptualize the subject of research in different ways, and, as a consequence, develop different research programs. On the other hand, developing a clear analytical framework for the investigated phenomena seems a truly pressing task, as it would make it possible for various approaches / theories to influence one another through critical discussion, thus developing (through correspondence) more adequate concepts.

According to the present author, the analytical determinant, i.e. the real *differentia specifica* of social movements lies in their conflict-based nature (K r i e s - b e r g 1973). After all, the foundations of sociological reflection are directly associated with power, that is also with social conflict, defined as the functional element of the society (S i m m e l 1904, e.g. M a r x 1904: 490–525) or the source of social change (Marx), to name just the two researchers. The very approach of sociology to the relationship between the society and the state assumes that the nature of this relationship is based on conflict. Sociology sees the society as the starting point and investigates the impact that it has on the institution of state (political science, on the other hand, uses the state as the starting point and investigates its impact on the society) (see: B e n d i x, L i p s e t 1957: 79–99). Alain Touraine, when describing the nature of social movements, apart from listing their three main components (the principle of identity, the principle of opposition and the principle of totality), claimed that:

the specific characteristic of a social movement is that of not being oriented toward consciously expressed values. Because it is situated on the level of the system of historical action, it is defined by the confrontation of opposing interests over the control of a society's forces of development and field of historical experience. A social movement is not the expression of an intention or of a conception of the world. It is not possible to Touraine speak of a social movement if one cannot at the same time define the countermovement to which it is in opposition. The labor movement is not a social movement unless, beyond all protests against the crises of social organization, beyond any pressures for negotiation, it is challenging the domination of the ruling class (T o u r a i n e 1977: 310).

The emphasis on the aspect of the “clash of opposing interests”, the existence of a counter-movement opposing a given social movement, and, above all, the pragmatic nature of this form of collective activity, which should not be seen through the prism of values or emotions (however trendy they might be today), constitutes the essence of social contestation. Touraine elaborates on this topic:

It does not matter whether that challenge is reformist or revolutionary, whether or not it is accompanied by confidence in the capacity of the institutional system to deal with the conflict. What is important is that the actor should no longer define himself in relation to functional norms or procedures of discussion and decision, but in relation to a general social conflict. This conflict does not consist of direct opposition between concrete social groups; it is challenging the control of social development as that development is defined by a cultural model and by the other elements of the system of historical action (T o u r a i n e 1977: 310).



Stemming from the sociological tradition (in the sense of making them the subject of the analysis), social movements, which, *nota bene*, for a long time had not been recognized by other social sciences – mainly due to the unstructured criteria of participation and non-formalized forms of exerting influence on institutionalized politics, are characterized by a conflict-based approach to the so-called social order at many levels thereof. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that the said conflict-based component, be it constitutive for social movements, may also refer to other phenomena of the broadly-understood social life, and therefore should be presented as a broader whole (e.g. M o u f f e 2005). Touraine understood this whole as a combination of three dimensions: identity, opposition, and totality – stressing (in the context of applicability of the conflict itself) the last element – the principle of totality, clearly emphasizing that: “No social movement exists unless the system of historical action, including each of its elements, is the object of «opposing visions held by class actors who are antagonists»” (T o u r a i n e 1977: 315).

## 5. Conclusion

Making an attempt at identifying the constitutive elements of social movements which, above all, would provide a strong definitional basis for these phenomena, the present author reviewed the main approaches analyzing the issues under consideration. Each of these approaches suggests a more or less precise conceptual network, which can be used to particularize this form of collective activity and/or investigate its empirical attributes. The component which appears to be characteristic of all the major traditions of research on social movements – be it to a variable extent – is social conflict. This corresponds to the sociological approach, stressing – since it was first recognized as a social discipline – the great importance of conflict for the totality of interpersonal relations at every level of accuracy. The very title of this article sets out the conditions for presenting social movements in terms of conflict, since it contains – intentionally put – a false alternative. The present author understands social control as a synonym of a hidden conflict, and, after all, social movements, by opposing selected elements of social reality (Touraine talks about historicity), in fact try to “blow up” a given *status quo* (for the sake of accuracy it should be mentioned that some movements strive for a change within a system, i.e. for an adjustment of only selected components of the said system). By accepting the conflict-based dimension, we can eliminate from the group of social movements the forms of collective activity (or more precisely – collective action) which constitute a part of the consensual process of social change (e.g. D e l l a P o r t a 2008; L a s h 2004). This, however, does not mean that social actions aimed at a compromise are not important from the point of view of shaping social relations. It is a matter of a completely different point of view, in which



society is not a piloted system, but the realization in conflict of a system of historical action, characterized by domination, protest, conflict, the contrast of light and darkness. Social movements remind us by their action that order and the consensus are merely the limited expression of domination, that social life consists of its forbidden and repressed possible as much as it does of its legitimated decisions and practices (T o u r a i n e 1977: 372).

Social movements so described call for a redefinition not just of the theoretical take on the matter, but also of the relevant area of politics, in order to be able to see what Robert Merton described as a hidden function of the system.

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### MIĘDZY KONTROLĄ SPOŁECZNĄ A KONFLIKTEM: RAMY ANALITYCZNE RUCHÓW SPOŁECZNYCH

**Streszczenie.** Zasadniczym celem artykułu jest próba wyznaczenia ram analitycznych ruchów społecznych, które stanowiłyby konstytutywny element tej formy aktywności zbiorowej. W celu zidentyfikowania owego elementu/elementów dokonano przeglądu czterech głównych podejść do badania ruchów społecznych, aby następnie osadzić tę problematykę w konfliktowej tradycji socjologicznej. Kluczową perspektywą z punktu widzenia tak postawionego celu analizy jest podejście Alaina Touraine’a.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ruchy społeczne; konflikt społeczny, kontrola społeczna, historyczność.