Transnational Solidarity Movements and the Intangible Strategies

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Current theorisations of Transnational Social Movements

The two main theories concerning Transnational Social Movements are the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) and to a less extent the New Social Movements (NSM's) Theory.

It seems that both the RM and NSMs theories appear to have been made to suit specific types of social mobilisation. NSMs theory, which attempts to supersede class based analysis, has been pictured as focusing on urban actors, on production and signification, on meanings and practices, and on cultural struggles over environmentalism, peace, women's rights, gay liberation, minority rights, students, youth movements; in short on multiple identities and on the 'why' (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992: 2; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998: 4, Edelman, 1999a: 17).

Resource mobilization Theory (RMT), on the other hand, has been considered a 'strategy-oriented' paradigm, concerned with the 'how'. In Edelman's terms, Resource Mobilization Theory has focused on

> ...the construction of 'social movement industries' made up of 'social movement organisations', regarded collective action mainly as interest group politics played out by socially connected groups rather than the most disaffected. Movement "entrepreneurs" had the task of mobilizing resources and channelling discontent into organizational forms. Resource availability and preference structures became the perspective's central foci rather than the structural bases of social conflict... (Edelman, 2001: 289).

Likewise the RMT paradigm has tended to disregard situations in which social movements, usually originating from the very poor, have emerged with few resources or little overt organization.

When both of these groups, economically favoured and economically disadvantaged, converge in the form of coalitions between global and local constituencies, polarised positions seems to be forced into dialogue. They may be combined in an eclectic approach that takes advantage of the different forms of conceptualisation of social phenomena, which do not oppose each other but at the same time expose the greater complexity of interactions of movements, which go beyond isolated frameworks, and demand different approaches to address the complex interactions that are derived from transnational formations. This work will use interchangeably the varied definitions derived from NSMs and RMT theories.

The latter only seems a bit emphasised due to the lack of development of the NSMs to tackle global and rural issues of peasant struggles (Stammers, n/p: 4, Edelman, 1999a:17). Nonetheless it is well equipped to tackle issues of symbolic values and resources (Edelman, 2001: 289) addressed in this paper.

As new forms of politics have been created by the spreading of globalisation, crossing borders and relating with other structures according to other processes of globalisation such as information, social movements can not be the exception, if they want to function at the level of opposing globalisation. Some theorizations of the transnationalisation of social movements are here reviewed in order to situate the case studies within existing approaches, and to suggest other areas for further exploration in case they are challenged by such developments.

The first relates with Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT). Olesen draws on it for his conceptualisation of 'transnational framing', where he asserts that 'the emergence of a new form of transnational solidarity', namely 'mutual solidarity', is manifested through 'informal networks' (2001: 1). Informal Transnational Solidarity Networks (ITSNs) are constructed through certain 'symbolic centers', and are expressions of 'transnational counterpublics'. Olesen underlines the concept of 'chains of equivalence' as a process of social construction opposing self-marginalizing notions of the politics of difference, hence, ITSNs are a result of social construction.

According to the author, this is better explained by the framing concept, built from social movements analysis as '...the processes of reality and grievance interpretation whereby social movements attempt to garner support' (2001: 2-3). The author adopts the definition of 'Transnational Framing', to develop his explanation of how ITSNs are socially constructed by this process.

According to this scheme, four factors are necessary to ensure a successful transnational frame, and will subsequently be shaped by the same process:

-Resonance with the belief systems of the society. This implies a degree of global consciousness, not only as a pre-condition, but also, as something rooted in previous solidarity or constructed in the process.

-The adoption of an 'injustice frame', that means the definition of a problem (neo-liberal restructuring in this case) and the proposal of a solution through collective action.

-Concurrence with a latent 'Master Frame'[i], in this case, the spread of human rights ideas after the end of the Cold War (which is seen in terms of a 'political opportunity'[ii]).

-Empirical credibility and the construction of experiential commensurability (resonance with the experiences of potential target groups) through the internet (Olesen, 2001: 3,14).

J. Smith, R. Pagnucco and C. Chatfield elaborate another theoretical framework for the study of Transnational Social Movements in the light of the Resource Mobilization Theory. They show that despite the variety of actors mobilized and their degree of formal coordination, the different political opportunities they face in three different arenas influence their strategic choices. However, '[t]he intervention of transnational social movements in national, intergovernmental, and transgovernmental political processes alters decision maker's perception...', clearly impacting on global policy (1997: 59). This impact is '...conditioned by their mobilizing structures; by the political opportunities inherent in national, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental contexts; and by strategies to mobilize resources to act' (1997:60). They show how the concept of Mobilizing Structures, applied to a transnational movement can adopt dramatic and diverse configurations of formal and informal shapes, and can be expressed within a movement or non movement dimension. The most elaborated of these configurations are formal movement structures, consisting of TSMOs, national SMOs, and transnational coalitions of NGOs built up to achieve specific movement commitments. In the case of the integration of informal social networks, the concept of Issue Networks is a useful one to explain the importance of the participation of clusters of activists and movements organizations, policymakers, intergovernmental officials, media and foundations. Having come together to reach a common purpose, '...these networks aid communication and strategic coordination, thereby facilitating movement activity' (1997: 64-65).

The idea of Structures of Opportunity is developed by the authors in the context of TSMs, in order to stress that these are factors that exist in the political and social environment of movements and are keys to constraint and facilitating the achievement of social change. These opportunities are structured in the three main areas of political decision making: national, intergovernmental, and transgovernmental (1997:66-67).

Another factor in addition to Mobilizing Structures, and Opportunity Structures, are Movement Strategies, which

are decisions taken in order to '...maximize the effectiveness of collective efforts to affect policy processes or to otherwise alter the political environment'(1997: 70-71). TSMOs possess two different strategic options: first, mobilizing strategies, which attempt to attract new activists and resources; and secondly, action strategies, which '...are the activities that social movements employ in order to influence policy' (1997: 70-71). The latter element will be important in examining the role of Transnational Social Movements aimed at changing the global trade rules in an oncoming chapter, especially as the authors state that TSMOs serve as 'vehicles for the diffusion of values, frames, tactics, and practices among different national populations', an action strategy that is difficult for most governments to control.

The authors suggest that TSMOs influence the results of global political decisions in three main ways: by attracting the attention of global elites to specific issues; by advising governments about potential problems; and by enhancing government accountability through their presence, interaction and the 'shaping of political processes that generate global policy' (1997: 73-74).

In a third theoretical framework, Marco Giugni and Florence Passy analyse solidarity movements through the concept of political altruism, which Passy defines as all actions: a)performed collectively, b)that have a political aim and c) whose outcomes are to benefit others . Such characteristics should be considered in addition to Bar-Tal framework (from Passy, 2001:6): a) they must benefit other persons, b)they must be performed voluntarily, c)they must be performed intentionally, d) the benefit must be the goal itself, and e) they must be performed without expecting any external reward. Passy equates actions performed by the solidarity movement to political altruism which consists of 'collective actions performed on behalf of other people and built upon a specific political cleavage....it is embedded in a specific social environment that gives it cultural and symbolic resources...', and it also intervenes at different areas and levels (Passy, 2001:6-8, 18). The solidarity movement is thus based on cultural and political resources, understood as "master frames" (see note VI) which frame the example of human rights used by Passy, but are useful too for the case studies in the fifth section of this paper:

The Christian world provides the movement with the idea of helping your neighbour, giving her/him love, assistance, protection, and care. From the humanist component of the Enlightenment, the solidarity movement draws a coherent discourse on the respect for human rights and individual freedom. Finally, the early socialist movement put forth the ideal of a more just and egalitarian society (Passy, 2001: 8-9).

Passy define another particularity of the contemporary solidarity movement. It moves on the same levels of intervention as any other social movement. It targets national governments and local authorities, but is distinguished because it moves on an international level. 'The fact that the movement often mobilizes on behalf of populations in other countries has facilitated its expansion to the international arena' (2001: 12).

Simone Baglioni briefly analyses the historical evolution of Solidarity Movements Organizations, showing the relevance of both the Christian charity, as Passy mentioned, and political liberalism, in the construction of such networks, a point worth stressing for the purposes of this paper (2001:220). Giugni asserts that 'religious beliefs and values are one of the principal causes of participation in non-profit organizations and activities' (2001: 236 from Ranci), perhaps due to the Christian emphasis on looking after other persons and giving assistance to suffering people, which (among other motivations) provides a strong justification '...from which to draw the resources to be invested in the movement'. These kinds of cultural traditions or 'master frames' provide the movement, not only with cultural and symbolic resources, but also with social, material, and human ones, as Giugni remarks (2001: 236-237).

Giugni (as Olesen, 2001) concludes that the most important lesson is that altruistic behaviour is the product of situations and circumstances, namely social relations (Giugni, 2001: 243).

In a fourth approach, C. Eschle and N. Stammers present a different way of framing the relationship between social

movements and global change: a categorisation of the study of social movements activism as either pragmatic, pessimistic, and tr

ansformationalist. The pragmatic approach, identified with official perspectives, relies on formal organisation and seeing the interface between state and non-state organisations as the unproblematic basis of political life: the appropriate arena for democracy and the source of social change via the shaping of policy. The pessimists, usually with a Marxist, post-structural, and ecologist background, consider NGOs as acting on behalf of the dominant interests of corporate politics. In brief, they consider that 'the possibilities for radical global-level changes are extremely limited'. The transformationalists regard the global action of social movements and their organizations as a serious factor in emancipation and social change. The utopian branch tends to perceive unity and homogeneity in social movements' organization and goals; and the critical transformationalist branch, '...is more sensitive to the substantive and organisational differences within and between movements and to problems of power and oligarchy' (Eschle and Stammers n/d: 4-5) .

The problems underlying each of these perspectives, include the differences in the stressing of concepts, the understanding and conceptualisation of movements, networks, organizations, and levels of action, as well as the neglect, mainly from the pragmatists and transformationalists point of view, of the 'dynamics of oligarchic and democratic possibilities in movement organizations and activism' (n/d: 7-13).

The authors argue for the adoption of a multidimensional perspective for the analysis of globalisation, cross-cutting the conceptualisation of fixed schema, and recognition of the '...mutually constitutive relationship between the local and the global. '[T]hey point out the tendency of formal and informal activism involved in TSMs to combine in complex configurations instrumental and expressive means for the application of their strategies, but including a network concept of social movement and of 'informal modes of activism'.

Eschle and Stammers highlight the analytical distinction between organizations and networks of informal interactions as constituting social movements (n/d: 24). They embrace Diani's definition of social movement, described as 'a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity' (Eschle and Stammers, n/d from Diani, 1992), adding 'that movement networks must necessarily encompass informal groups and extra institutional activism' (n/d: 16). This point enables more acute definitions of global activism. A more eclectic approach is needed, to cross theoretical and disciplinary boundaries, as well as global-local ones, and include analytical-on-the ground research (n/d: 24).

Notes

[i] "Master frames are interpretive media through which collective actors within a 'cycle of protest'... assign blame for the problems they are facing" (Olesen from Snow and Benford 1992: 139; and Tarrow, 1991).

[ii] "Political opportunities refer, *inter alia*, to changes in political power structures that facilitate the emergence of social movements" (Olesen in Mc Adam, 1996; and in Tarrow, 1998)