Rhode Island College
Digital Commons @ RIC

Faculty Publications | Faculty Books and Publications

10-2009

Resurrecting Smelser: Collective Power, Generalized Belief, and Hegemonic Spaces

Mikaila M. L. Arthur
Rhode Island College, marthur@ric.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ric.edu/facultypublications

Part of the Politics and Social Change Commons

Citation
Arthur, M. M. L. (2009). Resurrecting Smelser: Collective power, generalized belief, and hegemonic spaces. *Theory In Action*, *2*(4), 29-44. doi:10.3798/tia.1937-0237.09023

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Books and Publications at Digital Commons @ RIC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ RIC. For more information, please contact kayton@ric.edu.

Resurrecting Smelser

Collective Power, Generalized Belief, and Hegemonic Spaces

Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur
marthur@ric.edu

The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in *Theory in Action*, 2/4, October 2009 by the Transformative Studies Institute, All rights reserved. © Transformative Studies Institute, 2009. It is available at: http://transformativestudies.org/

Introduction

When people organize collectively, it is because they want something. In other words, a group of people has somehow come to *believe*, as a group, that some aspect of their social life needs to be altered. Most inquiries into the worlds of social movements start after this belief has emerged. For instance, resource mobilization theory, as articulated by McCarthy & Zald, hypothesizes that grievances[i] remain at a constant level in a population throughout time, while resources help these grievances turn into active social movement organizations (SMOs). While it is undoubtedly true that the population always has extant grievances which could be expressed given the right circumstances, the *content* of these grievances changes over time. For example, the current campaign to legalize and legitimate same-sex marriages in the United States has not only emerged from a repressed state among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people—it also emerged from a history in which such a demand would previously have been inconceivable.

This paper seeks to develop a general framework for understanding how it is that grievances come to be, and in emerging, how these new beliefs are altered and alter the worldviews with which they come into contact. Indeed, the two fundamental questions relating to collective belief in this sense are:

1. How is it that hegemony is escaped in social movement mobilization, or in other words, how do generalized beliefs emerge when they were inconceivable before; and
2. How do generalized beliefs, as part of social movement action, manage to create new spaces in the hegemonic order, or even create entirely new hegemonic orders?

In order to answer these questions, this paper will engage in a critical rereading of Neil Smelser's *The Logic of Collective Action*, an unfortunately underutilized work of classical collective behaviour scholarship. Smelser, however, cannot stand on his own. Collective behaviour theory, like much of the Parsonian tradition from which it emerged, lacks a critical understanding of the machinations of power. Gramsci (1971) and Foucault (1994; 1977) can add this necessary understanding and enable us to see the emergence of generalized beliefs in a new and more useful fashion.

Of course, some would say that this inquiry is misplaced. For instance, James Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* writes that beliefs contrary to the hegemonic order are present all the time but are contained within "hidden transcripts" that are not visible to the dominating classes (Scott, 1990). I do not take issue with Scott's general claim, but I think it is only that—a general claim, applicable in many social circumstances but completely descriptive of few of them. Indeed, it is most applicable (even according to Scott himself) in those systems of domination where power is most visible and harsh. Resistance in these social systems generally does not employ the repertoire (Tarrow, 1998) of the SMO, but rather the repertoire of the mob or of the revolution. In extreme authoritarian regimes (such as those that Weber would describe as sultanic), for instance, power is concentrated in the dictator to such an extent that any possibility of a role in decision making for other social groups—including social movements—is eliminated (Goodwin, 2001).

SMOs, instead, tend to exist in modernized formally democratic states with some level of citizenship rights. Here, Scott's thesis is less convincing; for such citizens can express disagreement with the system of domination without the fear of legalistic repression. They may not be able to act on this disagreement, but they can state it. So why would their grievances remain silent? Perhaps it is because, contrary to Scott, it is actually possible for people to be complicit in their own subjugation as specified by the "thick theory" of hegemony. It is only when this hegemony is shattered (or just disturbed slightly in the right places) that new

conceptions of grievances become possible. Where does this opening come from? How does it work? And what are its consequences?

Accounts of Generalized Belief in the Literature

The literature of social movements has, in general, turned away from the account of generalized beliefs[ii] as a crucial part of movement analysis. Rather, it has posited that grievances are always extant in the population and collective action occurs when various mechanisms (identities, networks, resources, or political opportunities) enable it (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; 2002). But it is clearly true that while there are always grievances of some sort (and perhaps there is even a constant *level* of grievances in the population), people perceive *certain* grievances as important at *certain* points of time. For instance, as noted above, the current campaign for the legalization of same-sex marriages in the United States would have been inconceivable in previous time periods for a variety of reasons, whether because those fighting for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered rights had other grievances to focus on (such as legalization of specific sex acts or the right to dance with each other in cabarets) or because the identities themselves did not yet exist. Similarly, before the wholesale movement of women and people of color into professional occupations, it would have been inconceivable for these groups to demand "equal pay for equal work."

Some social movement theorists have understood that grievances are not entirely constant across time. For instance, there is the notion of the "suddenly imposed grievance," in other words, grievances that emerge in response to specific and unitary events that highlight the salience of a particular issue or set of issues (McAdam et al., 2001). An example of a suddenly imposed grievance might be the 1773 Tea Act which led to the Boston Tea Party—there were of course many issues facing the colonists prior to this new law, but the law highlighted the salience of those issues and led to a new conception of the grievance as a basis for action. Even these analyses, however, suggest that grievances *in general* are constant and that the moments of "new grievance creation" are rather unique.

The focus on grievances was lost when resource mobilization theory (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; 2002) developed a need to differentiate itself sharply from the functionalist nature of the collective behaviour school that Smelser was a part of. In basing the analysis of social movements entirely on rationality, resource mobilization theorists and other contemporary analysts of social movements merely inherit a problem similar to that they criticize Smelser and his forbearers for (Ost, 2004): social movements cannot be properly understood when *either* the non-rational roots of emotive action are ignored *or* when the rational basis of choosing collective action as a problem-solving method are rejected. There are a variety of reasons why this can be problematic—Ferree (1992) points to the loss of understanding emotions as well as the flaws of assuming a universal actor that erase differences in race, class, gender, and historical circumstances.

A few analysts have pointed out the problematic nature of the loss of grievances from social movement studies. These analyses contest the foundation of contemporary social movement theory on modified rational choice assumptions[iii] (for instance, Chong's (1991) contention that "public goals" are not rational) without realizing the fact that rationality itself is a significant accomplishment for many social movement actors that must be fostered and developed (Ferree, 1992; Ost, 2004). Individuals who participate in social movements may behave impulsively, for instance lashing out against an arresting police officer or make choices based on non-rational motivations like altruism[iv], for instance participating in a social movement

where one is not the likely beneficiary and where indeed one may come to be harmed, such as White college students who joined the Black civil rights movement. Some social movements respond to this tendency for non-rational or irrational behaviour by working carefully to manage rational behaviour among participants. An example of this would be non-violence training, which aims to reduce impulsive and emotional behaviour based on anger and instead replace it with a rational focus on effective tactics (Ferree, 1992). However, for other social movements, the requirements of rationality may conflict directly with the ideologies of the social movement itself. Communal movements, for instance, often turn inward and specifically disavow personal (and sometimes even collective) gain.

Some analysts of rationality have defined a specific type of irrationality ("substantive") as whenever "…principles such as emotional, ethical, or political criteria assume primacy" (Segady, 1988), a statement broad enough to apply to most social movements. To take one example, consider the contemporary movement for animal rights, based in ethical principles of the inherent moral worth of individual animal lives. This movement goes beyond the altruistic notion of "speaking for the animals who cannot speak for themselves" to push for collective goods which participants will not benefit from.

The collective identities school of social movements theory does address the emergence of something like generalized beliefs. These are "cognitive, moral, and emotional connection[s] with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Similarly, we can talk of identity formation as the process by which "[w]e define ourselves as a unit against other units because we have convinced ourselves that something special bonds us" (Ost, 2004). These identities *can* emerge independently of social movement action but often are a tactic or product of mobilization. However, collective identities-as-generalized beliefs does not address how it is that people come to see some aspect of the context of their lives as a problem that a social movement can address.

Smelser's Theory of Collective Action

Neil Smelser's *Theory of Collective Action* has fallen out of favour with contemporary social movement analysts because it posits the social movement participant as an irrational actor—since rational actors would have chosen what Smelser sees as more effective means of pushing for change, i.e. institutionalized politics—and bases its theoretical assumptions on functionalist and psychological notions of the world. Indeed, Smelser considered sociology to be "polarized into camps, pro-science (their [Smelser and Lipset's] side) and anti-science (Mills and other bad guys [i.e. power theorists])" (Max, 1965). However, he offers a solution to the problem with contemporary accounts of social movements. His model shows how grievances become important to people (Smelser, 1963). Although other portions of his theory of collective action may be less compelling, we can continue to turn to contemporary analyses to explain how these generalized beliefs turn into social movements while using Smelser to explain where the generalized beliefs come from.

Smelser outlines a six-stage model of collective action (Smelser, 1963 pp. 15-18). First, *structural conduciveness* is a structural condition which permits or encourages certain forms of collective action. In terms of contemporary social movement analysis, structural conduciveness would be something like opportunity structure, though not limited to the political sphere. An example of structural conduciveness might be freedom of speech, coupled with available outlets for the creation and dissemination of speech like the Internet. Second, *structural strain* is the emergence of "ambiguities, deprivations, conflicts, and discrepancies" which, in combination with conduciveness, "reduces the range of possibilities of behavior" based on what the specific strain is. Structural strain is a way of saying that people must be annoyed about something.

It is then necessary for a *generalized belief* or a series of such beliefs to emerge. This belief "identifies the source of strain, attributes certain characteristics to this source, and specifies certain responses to the strain as possible or appropriate" (16), as discussed in more detail above. Fourth, *precipitating factors*, generally dramatic events which "give the generalized beliefs concrete, immediate substance," must occur—for instance, the murder of Mathew Shepard in relation to movements for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender civil rights, or the series of sexually violent crimes in Germany in 1973 that led to the emergence of Take Back the Night rallies. Once all of these determinates of collective action have been established, then the fifth stage, *mobilization* of participants must occur. This is the point at which a form of recognizable collective behaviour emerges, such as a mob, social movement, or revolution. Finally, *social control* determines how far the collective action will get. Social control includes violence and repression, but also surveillance: "a mechanism that coerces by means of observation" (Foucault, 1977 p. 170).

Strain does not always lead to the emergence of new generalized beliefs, but there must be some sort of strain in order for a generalized belief to emerge. For instance, at the most basic level, strain leads to hysterical, "wish-fulfilment" or pipe-dream types of generalized beliefs according to whether positive or negative generalization from the circumstances of ambiguity occurs. However, while hysteria and wish-fulfilment are likely to lead to collective action in the broad sense as in riots and crowds, they are unlikely to lead to coordinated social movement action and the development of hegemonic spaces since they do not systematically challenge the hegemonic order. Instead, they merely redefine the situation in terms more easily assimilated and responded to by participants. A more complex form of generalized belief is the hostile belief. In this type of belief, a specific agent is blamed for the condition of strain. Thus, the belief can enable the development of coordinated social movement action and can begin to fall under the

category of “grievances”. However, the hegemonic order is unlikely to be challenged since it is only a single individual or a group of individuals who are being targeted.

The generalized beliefs that can lead to challenges to the hegemonic order and thus the development of hegemonic spaces are norm-oriented and value-oriented beliefs. Norm-oriented beliefs are those which call for a restructuring of the rules and regulations governing social life, such as a legal reform. Value-oriented beliefs are those which call for a regeneration or reconstitution of a complete value system and are thus the most challenging to the hegemonic order. These beliefs, in general, are “the attempt of persons under strain to assess [and explain] their situation.”

But how is it that these beliefs emerge? Smelser writes that “…beliefs arise when structural strain is not manageable within the existing framework of action” (81). In other words, when situations develop that cannot be reconciled with existing norms and/or values, then a generalized belief will emerge that challenges either the existing norms and/or values or else something related to the structure seen as responsible for the conditions of strain. More specifically, Smelser writes that in terms of norm-oriented beliefs, the emergence of generalized beliefs is encouraged by a situation in which “avenues for agitation” are open, but obstacles remain, and participants perceive a precarious power balance and thus fear that the possibilities for agitation may be declining. For value-oriented beliefs, emergence is related to the fact that “strains have rendered the older values inadequate as bases for the institutionalization of social life [and therefore] are reconstituted by invention, importation, and elaboration” including the use of elements external to the culture or experience of adherents (Smelser, 1963).

It is obviously important for the emergence of collective action that these beliefs come to be held by many people. According to Smelser, precipitating events are one of the most important factors in this transmission, along with such more conventional notions as networks and diffusion (Gould, 1991; 1999; Soule, 1997; Valente, 1996). Precipitating events work to spread generalized beliefs by developing a focus on something immediate or by underscoring a condition of strain such that it becomes more significant in people’s minds. But this points out another limitation in Smelser’s model: he is helpful in providing answers as to what the *process* of grievance emergence looks like but does not go so far as to provide us with the *mechanisms*. It does seem likely that something like a precipitating event or the emergence of a “revolutionary intellectual” (Gramsci, 1971) from within the collectivity is a necessary part of the mechanism of grievance emergence. Gramsci also notes that consciousness of common cause (in his case class consciousness, but this analysis is applicable more broadly) develops through conversation and interaction, so the mechanism of grievance emergence must also include some sort of systematic consciousness raising for the aggrieved collectivity—much the function that consciousness-raising “rap groups” played during the early years of the women’s movement. Finally, Gramsci notes that the aggrieved collectivity must come to recognize the conflict it faces with others (and thus put at least a general face on the target of the grievance) through resistance met when attempting to put its interests into practice.

Functionalism and Power

One of the main shortcomings of Smelser’s work, like that of most of his fellow mid-century American functionalist social scientists, is that it ignores the workings of power. Functionalism assumes that institutions in society exist in order to serve the needs of society and that conflict only develops when there is an imbalance between these needs and those institutions. Therefore,

functionalist analysts of social movements, like Smelser, believe that social movements emerge out of disequilibrium in society. They do not see that power is working in these situations to promote the interests of some over the interests of others, and that therefore social movements are often responses to unequal power.

It could be said that Smelser does leave room for an analysis of power in his theoretical framework, insofar as he makes social control an important part of his theory of collective action. While social control is not always about power—it can be instead simply about norms of behaviour—Smelser includes not only this sort of social control but explicitly mentions how social control can "minimize conduciveness and strain," in addition to the role of "agencies of control." His discussions of more specific types of collective action also leave room to bring power back in. For instance, as noted above, when Smelser discusses norm-oriented movements he says that they emerge when "participants…perceive a precarious balance between their own power and the power of the opposition" (284).

Smelser is thus aware of how movement participants are unable to act because of the power of others to make the costs of action prohibitive. He is also to some degree aware of the actions of the second face of power, agenda control (Lukes, 2004). In Smelserian terms, this refers to the capacity of agents of control either to transform collective action from value-oriented, norm-oriented, and even hostile forms into hysterical or wish-fulfilment forms which are less threatening to the dominant group or the capacity to minimize the structural conduciveness that enables the formation of movements. But though Smelser's own analysis provides an account of how people break free of the third dimension of power, he does not see it at work. Rather than seeing generalized beliefs as "true" understandings of social circumstances that have been suppressed by powerful agents, he thinks that generalized beliefs are usually exaggerated and somewhat mystical responses to problems that may be real. He not only suggests that social movements are formed by irrational actors; he suggests they are formed by irrational actors who have unrealistic understandings of the problems they face. For instance, an ideal-typical Smelserian social movement might be the Floridians who sought an injunction to stop same-sex marriages in Massachusetts because of some sense that they were being harmed by these marriages. Similarly, Smelser might point to a group of homeless schizophrenics who ought to be mounting a movement for better medical care but instead are charging the government with wiretapping their brains. While undoubtedly social movements such as these arise frequently, most social movements are rooted in realistic—if sometimes slightly exaggerated, at least for strategic purposes—
conceptions of reality. But these conceptions of reality—these grievances and generalized beliefs—may not have been held in common forever. Rather, they often must emerge anew.

Though Smelser's focus on unrealistic grievances is a shortcoming of his theory, this shortcoming does not limit its usefulness in terms of process. In order to draw out what is indeed useful from Smelser, we must find a way to highlight what is missing, particularly power relations. This analysis will draw on the "dimensions of power" debates (Gaventa, 1980; Dahl, 1961; Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 2004; Lukes, 1974). These debates began with Robert Dahl's *Who Governs?* in 1961. He proposed a model of power based on pluralist political theory that posited that you could tell who held the power by looking at who "won" in decision-making processes. The "second face" of power, proposed by Bachrach and Baratz, suggested that power involves not only who wins in decision-making processes, but also those who are able to prevent particular decisions from being made at all through agenda control. Lukes added his third dimension to the model in 1974. The third dimension of power goes beyond observable actions

and behaviours to see when *potential* issues are kept out of the public sphere and the true interests of the subordinate population are suppressed.

The majority of the literature on power is not particularly concerned with social movements and collective behaviour. There are, however, some attempts at incorporating social movements (if not the larger literature around them) into power analyses. For instance, Gaventa's "Framework for Advocacy" lays out how advocacy organizations understand and respond to powerlessness and lack of participation while creating empowerment under each of the dimensions of power (Gaventa, 1995). He writes that under the first dimension of power, advocacy groups generally operate as lobbying organizations, while under the second dimension of power, they exist as grassroots organizations combining some professionalization with social movement behaviour. In contrast, advocacy groups dealing with the third dimension of power must engage in consciousness-raising. Although Gaventa's approach does help us start to see how different aspects of power affect the way in which contention operates, he does not go far enough. Indeed, we are still left with the fundamental question: what is it that makes people develop this new consciousness, and with it, grievances?

In addition, contemporary social movement theorists do not generally see the management or suppression of grievances as a tool used by powerful agents (e.g. states) against social movements or the groups with the potential to become social movements. For instance, studies of the repression of social movements have developed sophisticated three-dimensional models (Earl, 2003). Earl's model includes a variety of elements and does seem to take into account the difference between first dimensional power and second dimensional power (i.e. "channelling" or restrictions on the type of action social movement organizations are permitted to engage in). It does not, however, include the third dimension of power (discussed below). Earl does not include government-sponsored propaganda, for instance, as a type of repression. This seems to typify the lack of attention to the third dimension of power in contemporary social movement theory in general.

Hegemonic Spaces

There are alternative notions of power in the sociological and political science literature that do not draw on the "faces of power" debate, even as attempts have been made to bring them together (e.g. Digeser, 1992). These other analyses are generally based in Foucauldian and Gramscian notions of power, notions which emphasize the ubiquity of power and the constant presence of resistance. Incorporating these types of power analyses into Smelser's framework can enable us to see how power structures the emergence of new grievances.

To Foucault, power is everywhere and structures all interactions. Therefore, it is impossible to escape it, and indeed power is not something someone *has*, but rather something which is *exercised* over someone else (Foucault, 1977). However, Foucault also believes that power cannot be exercised without freedom, though this notion of freedom is not the freedom from constraints (Foucault, 1994). Rather, it is the freedom of an agent, under constraint, to calculate and choose among his or her options (Garland, 1997). This means that even those whom we might consider powerless, so long as they are not subject to particularly coercive power (i.e. physical force or psychological duress), still are "free" in some sense and still may be able to exercise power in certain contexts (for instance, in social movements).

Similarly, Gramsci's notion of hegemony allows for resistance to arise. Indeed, hegemony is most powerful when people *consent* to its operation (Gramsci, 1971). In order to break out of the hegemonic mold, people "simply" need to withdraw their consent (though it is

still possible for hegemony to be maintained through coercion). For Gramsci, there are three types of hegemony: *integral hegemony*, which involves mass consent and generally does not provoke distrust of the ruling class; *minimal hegemony*, in which dominance in maintained only through the selective incorporation of elements of the would-be opposition into the ruling class (this notion is quite similar to that of the second dimension of power); and *decadent hegemony*, where dominance is decaying and beginning to reveal latent conflict. It is in the decadent hegemonic situation when the development of grievances becomes possible.

Similarly, there are three classes of responses to the hegemonic system (Schaffer, 1995): the actors can lack perception of their own oppression ("false consciousness"), they can perceive their oppression but do nothing, or they can engage in resistance. Contemporary social movement theory has typically been interested in explaining the move from the second stage to the third. But here, we have been interested in explaining the movement from the first stage to the second. For instance, Gramsci's own theories are used to suggest that the hegemonic system as imparted by the elite to the subaltern prevents them from becoming revolutionary (Schaffer, 1995). So we have asked how it is that the mental obstacles to mobilization and the barriers to consciousness of grievances are removed.

The development of this sort of conscious grievance is a *process* (Gramsci, 1971). Through talking with others in similar situations, people come to see the conflict between their interests and the hegemonic system when they attempt to put their interests into practice and experience resistance from the ruling class. This resistance "opens their eyes" to the latent conflict between the subordinate and dominant groups and thus paves the way for the emergence of hegemonic spaces. For instance, resistance can occur even when the actor is not thinking of their action as resistance: "'unwitting resistance' is resistance that is not intended…by the actor yet is recognized as threatening by targets and other observers" (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004 p. 545). This sort of resistance may provoke responses from the targets or observers that show the disconnect between lived experiences and real interests.

Though the notions are not by any means identical, the concept of hegemony has a lot in common with the notion of the third dimension of power (Lukes, 1974). Again, when the third dimension of power is operating, *potential* conflicts are prevented from surfacing. But people can be made aware of their "real interests" and thus come to develop and express grievances.

Conclusion

Smelser was greatly influenced by the Parsonian tradition in sociology. While Parsons has been criticized like Smelser for his inattention to power, this criticism may go too far. Parsons did write about power and believed it to be an important avenue for sociological inquiry. For instance, Parsons did have an understanding of a type of power that bears some similarities to Gramsci's hegemony:

> …a party may wield considerable power while at the same time having few coercive sanctions with which to enforce its commands if they are questioned by subordinates. Thus is possible if the power-holding party enjoys a broad 'mandate' to take authoritative decisions ceded or acquiesced in by those subject to the decisions—i.e., if those over whom the power is exercised 'agree' to subject themselves to that power (Giddens, 1968 p. 262).

However, Parsons did not believe that power should be conceived of as "power over." He thought of power as "power to"; in other words, "…the capacity to mobilize the resources of the society for the attainment of goals for which a general 'public' commitment has been made, or may be made" (Parsons, 1957 p. 140). Parsons goes so far as to directly criticize C. Wright Mills for his focus on power as "illegitimate" and for his belief that power is the most important

determinate of “what happens in society.” Given a conception of power that focuses on the attainment of collective goods, it is harder to see why challenging it might be necessary.

In addition, Parsons does not see power as necessarily hierarchical (Giddens, 1968). In other words, he does not pay attention to the inherent conflicts of interest in power systems that would result in the “questioning” referred to above. This lapse makes Parsons, as well as the functionalist theorists following him (e.g. Smelser) unable to see how powerful agents shape the terms of the questioning. Therefore, despite the fact that Smelser creates the very tools that we can use to understand how it is that “subordinates” come to “question” the terms of power relationships, he does not see that it is power that they are questioning. Indeed, though Smesler himself would not have seen it this way, his account of social movements is an attempt to explain how it is that resistance can emerge and break through the hegemonic order. Otherwise, where would resistance come from?

We, on the other hand, can reinscribe power into Smelser’s theory. Indeed, Gramsci’s notion of resistance to hegemony has a lot in common with the emergence of structural strain and generalized belief. In both models, a subordinate or marginalized population finds that their life experiences conflict somehow with the way that they think about the world (hegemonic or ideological). This conflict *in practice* causes the subordinate or marginalized group to become aware of the conflict *in principle*. For instance, the women of the mid-twentieth century who achieved advanced education and worked before marriage or during wartime were equipped with the tools for an independent intellectual and economic life which was subsequently denied to them. This fact made it possible for women to realize their oppression in Betty Friedan’s (1963) theoretical sense.

Smelser describes this process without recourse to power. However, it is the very existence of power that limits the ability of subordinate or marginalized groups to become conscious of their grievances. It is not necessarily powerlessness, as some power theorists might hold—indeed, as Foucault says, power *is* everywhere. Subordinate and marginalized groups often have the ability to exercise significant amounts of power through their collective action. But the “third dimensional” power of the dominant group—its ability to maintain hegemony—prevents the subordinate or marginalized group from seeing its “real interests” and beginning to engage in conflictual social relations.

It is only after the emergence of a grievance that contemporary social movement theory can take over. Whether the grievance is ever articulated in a public way (rather than remaining as a "hidden transcript" [Scott, 1990]), whether this public articulation mobilizes a movement, and whether this movement ends up having an impact are questions for social movement theory to resolve. Indeed, contemporary social movement theory is where we turn for the answer to the second question posed at the beginning of this paper: how is it that new hegemonic orders are instituted, and how is it that social movement organizations manage to create and maintain hegemonic spaces? The impacts of social movements are not limited to the achievement of certain policy goals or gaining access to the means of governance. In addition, social movements seek to change the hegemonic order or develop hegemonic spaces. They want to develop new collective identities, raise consciousness, and help people to see their real interests. In addition, even when social movements do not necessarily seek to challenge the hegemonic order, it often changes anyway as an unintended consequence of social movement activity. For instance, the women’s movement’s emphasis on empowering women to enter the workforce and on fighting for opportunities for women’s participation in the labour market has led to a general feeling (especially among educated women) that they *must* work in order to be truly liberated women,

even when this work conflicts with family responsibilities or leads to a position of greater personal oppression than they would otherwise experience.

Most of these issues can be satisfactorily addressed by various schools of contemporary social movement theory (resource mobilization, political opportunity structure, political context, diffusion/networks, collective identity, or framing). But we cannot take for granted that grievances exist at some sort of constant level. Instead, we must account for how and why grievances emerge when they do, so that we can understand how it is that movements themselves ever do manage to arise.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Steven Lukes, Leslie-Ann Bolden, Cheryl Ann Holzmeyer, Benjamin Ledsham, and Dongtao Qi for their comments on earlier drafts, as well as the participants in Power, Domination, and Resistance, Spring 2004, for helping to clarify the ideas behind this paper. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2005 American Sociological Association Annual Meetings in Philadelphia and at the New York University workshop on Power, Politics, and Protest.

Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Rhode Island College. Her research is about social movements within organizations, with a particular focus on curricular change in higher education.

---

1. In this paper, a "grievance" is a way of articulating a problem facing a collectivity in such a fashion as to make clear that things do not have to be this way and that someone, even if it is a generalized other, is responsible. While I agree with Resource Mobilization theorists that grievances can be "manipulated or made up" (McCarthy & Zald 1977), this fact does not make them any less real or any less important in the minds of those who hold them. Additionally, grievances are more likely to be acted upon to the extent that the responsible party is clearly specified (Javeline 2003).

ii. I use the term "generalized beliefs" to refer to collectively held explanations of social phenomena. While they need not be critiques of the status quo, newly emergent generalized beliefs can serve as such critiques when they begin to challenge and/or replace older beliefs. While held collectively, these beliefs need not necessarily be shared by all like-minded individuals, but they must be held in such a manner as to make the paths to action clear.

iii. As Ferree (1992) puts it, resource mobilization theory relies on a "thin" notion of rationality which suggests that individuals act only to maximize their own interests as individuals. While there are other ways of conceptualizing rationality described by Ferree, this resource mobilization definition forms the basis of my discussion of rationality in this paper.

iv. Altruism is by definition selflessness, thus contradicting the "thin" notion of rationality. Some rational-choice based social movements theorists have come to see the role of altruism as a mobilizing force or reward for action, but yet they continue to see it as non-rational (Chong 1991).

References

Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. (1962) The Two Faces of Power, *American Political Science Review,* 56, pp. 947-952.

Chong, D. (1991) *Collective Action and the Civil Rights Movement,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

Dahl, R. A. (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City,* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

Digeser, P. (1992) The Fourth Face of Power, *The Journal of Politics,* 54, pp. 977-1007.

Earl, J. (2003) Tanks, Tear Gas, and Taxes: Toward a Theory of Movement Repression, *Sociological Theory,* 21, pp. 45-68.

Ferree, M. M. (1992) The Political Context of Rationality: Rational Choice Theory and Resource Mobilization, in: Morris, A. D. and Mueller, C. (Eds.) *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* (New York: Vintage Books).
Foucault, M. (1994) *Power,* (New York: The New Press).
Friedan, B. (1963) *The Feminine Mystique,* (New York: W. W. Norton).
Garland, D. (1997) 'Governmentality' and the Problem of Crime, *Theoretical Criminology,* 1, pp. 173-214.
Gaventa, J. (1980) *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley,* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press).
Gaventa, J. (1995) Citizen Knowledge, Citizen Competence, and Democracy Building, *The Good Society,* 5.
Giddens, A. (1968) 'Power' in the Recent Writings of Talcott Parsons, *Sociology,* 2, pp. 257-273.
Goodwin, J. (2001) *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991,* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press).
Gould, R. V. (1991) Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871, *American Sociological Review,* 56, pp. 716-29.
Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* (New York: International Publishers).
Hollander, J. A. and Einwohner, R. L. (2004) Conceptualizing Resistance, *Sociological Forum,* 19, pp. 533-554.
Javeline, D. (2003) The Role of Blame in Collective Action: Evidence from Russia, *American Political Science Review,* 97, pp. 107-121.
Jenkins, C. (1983) Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements, *Annual Review of Sociology,* 9, pp. 527-53.
Lukes, S. (1974) *Power: a Radical View,* (London; New York: Macmillan).
Lukes, S. (2004) *Power: A Radical View,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
Max, M. L. (1965) Some Limitations of 'Science' in Sociology: A Comment on Lipset and Smelser, *Kansas Journal of Sociology,* 1, pp. 42-45.
McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. and Tilly, C. (2001) *Dynamics of Contention,* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
McCarthy, J. D. and Zald, M. N. (1977) Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory, *American Journal of Sociology,* 82, pp. 1212-41.
McCarthy, J. D. and Zald, M. N. (2002) The Enduring Vitality of the Resource Mobilization Theory of Social Movements, in: Turner, J. (Ed.) *Handbook of Sociological Theory,* pp. 533-65 (New York: Plenum).
Ost, D. (2004) Politics as the Mobilization of Anger: Emotions in Movements and in Power, *European Journal of Social Theory,* 7, pp. 229-244.
Parsons, T. (1957) The Distribution of Power in American Society, *World Politics,* 10, pp. 123-143.
Polletta, F. and Jasper, J. M. (2001) Collective Identity and Social Movements, *Annual Review of Sociology,* 27, pp. 283-305.
Schaffer, S. E. (1995) Hegemony and the Habitus: Gramsci, Bourdieu, and James Scott on the Problem of Resistance, *Research and Society,* 8, pp. 29-53.
Scott, J. C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts,* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
Segady, T. W. (1988) Rationality and Irrationality: New Directions in Weberian Theory, Critique, and Research, *Sociological Spectrum,* 8, pp. 85-100.
Smelser, N. (1963) *Theory of Collective Behavior,* (New York: Free Press).
Soule, S. A. (1997) The Student Divestment Movement in the United States and Tactical Diffusion: The Shantytown Protest, *Social Forces,* 75, pp. 855-882.

Soule, S. A. (1999) The Diffusion of an Unsuccessful Innovation, *Annals of the American Academy.*, 566, pp. 120-131.

Tarrow, S. (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.).

Valente, T. W. (1996) Social Network Thresholds in the Diffusion of Innovations, *Social Networks,* 18, pp. 69-89.