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Comparative Social Movements
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10-19-05

Tarrow, Social Movements and Collective Identities:
Framing Mobilization around Nationalism

India was not taken away, but given away; Cochabambinos have a claim to their resources, and not even a legally contracted international conglomerate can withhold their water; all are equal, and racial segregation in Nashville lunch counters created second class citizens. These three arguments used in different social movements have framed their causes using one underlying theme. The focus is on the collective ownership of territorial and communal rights, in short: nationality. While the Salt March in India, the Water War in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the lunch counter sit-ins in Nashville, Tennessee mobilized to achieve different goals, all three arguments invoke ownership of a *national identity* to raise consciousness and move people to action.

Sidney Tarrow in his work, Power in Movement, proposes that framing contention is a crucial component of both the consciousness raising and the mobilization of social movements. In this essay I will reshape and build upon Tarrow's concept of framing by examining the role of nationalism as a "collective action frame" that can be used to raise consciousness and mobilize social movements. I will show that while Tarrow does recognize nationalism as a collective action frame, he utterly understates nationalism's importance as a means to raise consciousness and solidarity as well as to mobilize individuals to action. I will utilize three distinct cases we have studied in class to highlight the virtues and shortcomings of Tarrow's interpretation of nationalism as a collective action frame. I will first focus on nationalism as it is used to interpret the nation as a physical entity rooted in territorial boundaries in India and in Cochabamba,

Bolivia. Lastly, I will analyze nationalism as a collective action frame based on the interpretation of nation as a theoretical entity defined by its role as a guarantor of communal rights and privileges in civil society, as exemplified by the desegregation of lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee.

Before addressing these cases, it is important to understand Tarrow's analysis of collective action frames and nationality. Throughout Power and Movement, Tarrow makes clear his position that the creation of modern nation-states defined how social movements were mobilized. While internationalism and globalization theories may offer new insights into modern social movements, I argue that nationalism has played, and continues to play a foundational role in many social movements. This does not stray far from Tarrow when he writes: "state building provided an opportunity structure for emerging movements, and movements of ordinary people helped to shape each future state" (Tarrow, 58). He defines how the evolution of nation-states from decentralized, autonomous regions to centralized, strong nation-states discouraged institutional participation and reduced local autonomy. *Post facto*, this evolution moved participation from institutional to non-institutional means, often times resulting in violent confrontations (Tarrow, 55). Tarrow acknowledges how social movements could help to define emerging states and then utilize the power structures within them when he states, "as movements learned to use the apparatuses of national communications and consolidated states, governments had to accept grudgingly forms of collective action whose legitimacy they had earlier resisted" (Tarrow, 65). In this statement, Tarrow ties social movements directly to the emergence of the modern nation-state. Essentially, Tarrow believes that modern social movements act within the political opportunity

created by nation-states, even though that political opportunity structure *may* have been affected by social movements.

Similarly, Tarrow acknowledges that nationality *could* be used as a collective action frame for a social movement. However, using Snow's "frame alignment" analysis, to which Tarrow prescribes, it is logical to assume that nationality is not a very useful collective action frame for a social movement that seeks "substantial social change" (Tarrow, 110). Tarrow would argue that nationality can only make an incremental change in symbolism because the nation is already a recognized symbol for preexisting power structures. While the last case in this paper agrees that the nation as a symbol evokes preexisting power structures, I argue that the de-segregation of lunch counters in Nashville is a substantial. Furthermore, the cases of the Salt March and the Water War both demonstrate conceptions of a nation far different from the preexisting power structures—the first because no autonomous "Indian" nation previously existed, and second because the Cochabamban government had lost its legitimacy when selling its water rights. The following three cases define nationality in two ways: as a connection to physical properties—especially land, or as a guarantor of theoretical concepts—especially communal or civil rights. By defining the term "nationality" in these two ways, it is easier to see how social movements can successfully achieve change using nationality as a collective action frame. However, Tarrow theoretically challenges the efficacy of such a common frame when he questions "movements that adapt too well to their societies' cultures... —for what society has dominant values that do not support existing power arrangements?" (Tarrow, 110). Simply stated, a colonized society exists as a nation-state that is subjected to external and unpopular power structures.

Gandhi's statement that India was not taken away, but given away, offers many questions that help to frame the Salt Marches that would eventually lead to the independence of the nation. Who rightfully owns India? How was it given away? And for that matter, what is India? Due to space constraints I cannot attempt to rehash Gandhi's answers to these questions. Instead, my focus is on Gandhi's framing of the Salt Marches via this syllogism (that those who first inhabited the land should be privileged to the resources which accompany that land, and need only to recognize their autonomy in order to regain those resources), which exemplifies the power of nationality as a collective action frame. By focusing on the physical attributes of the inhabited land as well as by defining the inhabitants of the land through physical characteristics, India, as a nation, exists regardless of political recognition. Thus, India was defined by the people who lived within certain physical boundaries, and that those inhabitants were entitled to access to the natural resources where they resided.

While some might argue that India was not a nation when Gandhi organized the Salt Marches, my argument utilizes a fluid definition of nationality as discussed above. With this interpretation of nationality we may witness, as Joshua Gamson argues, "a process of boundary construction and identity negotiation: As contests over membership and over naming, these debates are part of an ongoing project of delineating the 'we' whose rights and freedoms are at stake in the movements" (Gamson, 337). For my purposes, it is irrelevant whether or not Gandhi mobilized the Salt Marches as a movement of Indians for Indians. It is clear that the concept of nationality was the fulcrum of the movement; it was based in the dichotomous relationship of the colonizer versus the colonized. Specifically, the Salt Marchers mobilized around their inability to

access salt, a natural resource that was once free to those who would harvest it, which was later subject to an “obnoxious,” foreign-imposed tax.

This argument is echoed during the Water Wars in Cochabamba, Bolivia at the turn of the century. The residents of Cochabamba and the surrounding area felt they were being unjustly deprived of their water resources due to the new pricing structures imposed by a foreign entity. This instance, however, is more complicated by the exchange of the water rights to an international corporation via a legal government contract. Still, nationality played a significant role in both mobilizing and sustaining the movement to dissolve the contract between Aguas del Tunari and the city of Cochabamba. Cochabambinos felt an entitlement not only to the water they needed to live, but also to the existing infrastructure that had been created to distribute water in the city. Because of this entitlement, “people did not want to wait for a deadline (for the government to dissolve the contract with Aguas del Tunari). They said, ‘We’re going to take over Aguas del Tunari right now’” (Olivera, 38). During the following occupation of the head offices, Olivera reminded the protestors that “the building itself was our collective property and destroying it did not constitute a blow against the foreign company” (Olivera, 38).

While the *Coordinadora* organized specifically to dissolve the contract between Aguas del Tunari and the city, Olivera’s rhetoric of struggle against a foreign company and more broadly against foreign-imposed, neoliberal economic structures creates an “us versus them” dichotomy based on nationality. However, nationality in this instance is problematized by the government’s endorsement of the neo-liberal reforms. In doing so, it made defining the struggle in terms of nationality difficult. Not only did Olivera invoke

nationality in his rhetoric, his emphasis on the notion that inhabitants are entitled to the natural resources of the local terrain, interprets the nation of Cochabamba as a physical entity rooted in territorial boundaries. Though Olivera used other collective action frames to support the movement, including the rights of individuals to have fair access to the necessities of life, the rhetoric he uses against foreign manipulations of a corrupted government via neoliberal reform invokes the same division of power rooted in colonialism as was used in the Salt Marches of India.

In the previous two cases, social movements have used the collective action frame of nationality as a physical entity, arguing that the inhabitants of India and Cochabamba were entitled to salt and water rights because they were inhabitants who needed such resources to live. States can also be framed as a theoretical entity that is obligated to guarantee the rights and privileges of its citizens. This was the case in Nashville, Tennessee during the struggle to desegregate lunch counters in 1960. In this instance, protestors framed their protest in nationality by emphasizing the equality of all citizens under the law. Interestingly, this equality was a self-imposed constraint created by the government of the United States and can be dated back to the founding of the country. Thus, people of color in Nashville did not have to redefine the rights of citizens. Instead, they needed to emphasize their status as citizens of the United States who were entitled to equal treatment. While some form of legal precedent for their actions existed from the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case in 1954, the rejection of “separate but equal” was not applied immediately to all facets of life in the United States. While the right to equal protection under the law is not a tangible right based on territory, it is a theoretical right guaranteed by the common understanding of nation as it is defined in the

United States. In that regard, the Nashville Sit Ins were based on concepts of nationality and more specifically, inclusion into a nationality that was once formally based on race. People of color in Nashville could organize around nationality because of a prior shift in the understanding of nationality that became more inclusive. At least inadvertently, Tarrow recognizes this when he states, “equal opportunity was a useful bridge, based on traditional *American* political rhetoric, between the movement’s main internal constituency, the southern black middle class, and the white liberal ‘conscience constituents’” (Tarrow, 117—my emphasis). While some form of recognition may be present in Power in Movement, Tarrow’s theory does not fully account for the power of nationality as a collective action frame.

After analyzing the Salt March in India, the Water War in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the Nashville Sit Ins, it is clear that nationality can be used as a very powerful collective action frame for various social movements. This challenges Sidney Tarrow’s interpretations of what collective action frames can be used to spur significant social change. Still, I believe the advantages and drawbacks of organizing around the frame of nationality are more complicated than I have presented in this essay. Nationality, as I have defined it, could easily be considered a form of identity politics, which should be analyzed in conjunction with the use of nationality as a collective action frame. Furthermore, the concept of nationality will most likely be expanded and redefined through the emerging frameworks of internationalism and globalization. It is inevitable that one day we will be analyzing the implications of collective action framed in the nationality of a common global citizenship.

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