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ANALYSING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

A comparison of European and Latin-American approaches since the 1970s

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ANALYSING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: A COMPARISON OF EUROPEAN AND LATIN-AMERICAN APPROACHES SINCE THE 1970s

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July 2009

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Abstract / Resumen

Analysing social movements: a comparison of European and Latin-American approaches since the 1970s
Camille Goirand

Since the end of the 1960s, social movements have proliferated throughout the Western world and their "newness" have been stressed by sociology. Nevertheless, we observe big differences between the perspectives adopted by Social Sciences in Latin America in comparison with Europe and North America, where the theories of collective action motivated an important number of empirical researches and deep debates, especially on the model of resources mobilization. In Latin America, though, an approximation towards the values, identities and the sociology of the subject was predominant. During the period of democratization, Political Sociology placed in half the way between action and observation. This article presents these approaches, proposes some explanatory hypotheses of its differences and then underlines its continuities. In the second part, the article shows how the contributions of the "sociology of the mobilizations" is necessary to enrich the perspectives habitually spread by social movements in Latin America.

Key words: Latin America, Europe, social movements, mobilization theories

Análisis de los movimientos sociales: una comparativa de las aproximaciones europea y latinoamericana desde los años setenta
Camille Goirand

A partir de finales de los años sesenta, en el mundo occidental se multiplicaron los movimientos sociales, al tiempo que la sociología subrayó sus "novedades". Sin embargo, observamos diferencias grandes entre las perspectivas adoptadas por las ciencias sociales, en América Latina, por un lado, y por el otro en Europa y América del Norte. En estos últimos, las teorías de la acción colectiva suscitaron un número importante de búsquedas empíricas y vivos debates, en particular sobre el modelo de la movilización de los recursos. En América Latina, una aproximación hacia los valores, las identidades y la sociología del sujeto fue predominante. Durante el período de las democratizaciones, la sociología política se situó a medio camino entre la acción y la observación. Este artículo presenta primero estos enfoques, propone algunas hipótesis explicativas de sus divergencias y luego subraya las continuidades. En una segunda parte, muestra cómo el recurso a las aportaciones de la sociología de las movilizaciones es necesario para enriquecer las perspectivas habitualmente difundidas por los movimientos sociales de América Latina.

Palabras clave: América Latina, Europa, movimientos sociales, teorías de la movilización

Since the end of the 1960s, social movements have proliferated throughout the Western world and their "newness" been stressed by sociology. In Europe as well as in North America and Latin America "new social movements" were initiated that protested against the social order in Western Europe and in the North America after 1968, or which were actors in opposition to the authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe and Latin America from the late 1970s and early 1980s. Even if they vary in their organisation and their demands – pacifist, civil rights or feminist movements, homosexual and African-American mobilisations, environmental groups or neighbourhood associations – all have common characteristics. Therefore, some sociologists have tended to create a distinctive analytical category: that of "new" social movements. And yet, depending on the place and period, the inherent specificity of each movement included in this category is striking. In the USA, the civil rights movement had made a breakthrough by the 1950s and particularly the 1960s. It was then replaced in the 1970s by more violent identity-based movements rooted in the vindication of black pride and dignity, while protests against the Vietnam War were increasing on the campuses. At the same time, in Latin America, after most of the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas had failed[1], progressive Catholic priests have supported actions which, as they pressed for recognition of the dignity of the poor and humble by the political power, have progressively contributed to structuring oppositions to the military regimes.

In Western Europe, it was mostly after 1968 that different movements made a breakthrough, particularly feminist and environmentalist movements, while pacifism was at its peak in Germany in the early 1980s. At the same time, "civilian societies" were attempting to organise opposition to the socialist regimes, for instance in Poland, as early as 1981[2].

1. See for instance, Wickham-Crowley, 1991.
2. See, for example, Dalton and Kuechler, 1990.

What do all these “new social movements” have in common? The common expectation of social and political change does not in any way make them different from more ancient and conventional social movements, such as workers’ movements, which, in their own time, also involved alternative values and prospects for society.

In fact, within the category “new social movement”, two major differences can be highlighted, by comparing the USA and Europe, on one hand, to Latin America on the other. Firstly, the category is used for extremely varied political and social environments. In Latin America, contention was directed much of the time against authoritarian and repressive regimes in situations of increasing social inequality and large-scale economic crisis. Moreover, the defeat of armed opposition groups, together with a renewed trust in reformism and social-democracy[3], sparked a reshuffling of the Left and the party systems. Thus, in terms of the expression of protest emanating from social movements, it opened up a new political space which did not exist before. This context reveals obvious disparities with the democratic societies of the North at the end of a thirty-year period of economic growth.

Secondly, approaches adopted by social sciences in Latin America since the 1970s are clearly distinct from those favoured in North America, as well as on the Old Continent. Even if observers have generally focused on the question of values and on demands for social change, their analysis was based on very different conceptual frames. Since the 1960s, mobilization sociology in the USA and Europe has significantly enriched its empirical research and constructed innovative models of analysis, while vehement controversy between the supporters of different analysis and research models set the resource mobilization approach against that of the “new social movements”, especially present in Europe (Klandermans, 1986). Issues linked to strategic analysis and the rational-

3. This is, for instance, what Norbert Lechner (1988) mentioned as early as the 1980s.

ity of the actors[4], to resource mobilization[5] or to the organisational frame of social movements[6] then became generalised.

In Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, research on social movements was particularly abundant, but between social scientists the debate taking place in Europe made hardly any impact. Not only was the ìnew social movementsî approach widespread but the other outlooks (which remained largely unmentioned) have been rarely amended, enriched or come under discussion. Simultaneously, since the 1980s, in Western Europe, the contribution of research work done primarily in North America[7] has been largely debated and adopted by the sociology of social movements. These debates, though hackneyed, if not regarded as altogether tedious by some analysts of collective action and contention, have remained meaningful until today.

Until recently, in Latin America, scientific production developed outside the issues raised by these debates. A glance at the bibliography quoted in published work on mobilization can give a general notion of this: in most cases the perspectives mentioned above are missing. The political sociology of Latin Americans, but also that of the Latin-Americanists of Europe or North America has based much of its research analysis and concepts on the New Social Movements (NSM) approach[8].

4. We refer, in particular, to the work of Mancur Olson or J.G March and Herbert Simon on collective action and organisations.
5. Notably: Oberschall, 1973; MacCarthy and Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978.
6. Inglehart, 1977 ; Melucci, 1985.
7. The purpose of this text is not to present an inventory of writings on social movements and collective action since the 1960s. That is why only a few significant authors or works are quoted in the following notes, which are not intended to be exhaustive. The references given here, as well as the brief mention of research themes, are merely indicative.
8. Since the 1980s a great deal of research has been done on the issue, followed by rather large-scale comparative publications. For instance: Alvarez and Escobar, 1992. It is worth noticing that the works published outside Latin America have adopted quite similar approaches, for example, when published by Slater,1985 and in two special issues of the journal Latin American Perspective, 1994.

While on one hand, attention was primarily drawn to the link between socio-political change and these movements, on the other, this debate has been inseparable from the political stances and commitment of those who conducted it, the frontier between sociology and political action being then hard to define, if it existed at all.

The observation of mobilizations, based on North American or European cases, emphasised the importance of the organisational characteristics of social movements, even when the latter were ìnewî and built around values. In Latin America, the analysis of organisations aroused less interest than that of discourses, demands or values, with a more general reference to the political and social significance of these movements. And yet, in the Western world as much as in Latin America since the 1970s, contentious collective action shares specificities in terms of organisation. The latter is, in most cases, fragmented, territorial and associative[9]. Thus, contention emerged from the "new" social movements created outside the traditional spheres of mobilization, especially the work place, here as well as over there. Although it was undeniably mentioned, the subject was more often dealt with in terms of general statements, rather than systematic research, in the case of Latin America[10].

The first point that this article proposes to make is to highlight the discrepancy between the debates on, and the scientific approaches of each continent to an object that is close at hand and worth comparing. Some hypothetical explanations will be attempted. Finally, an account will be given of todayís diverging scientific paths, and of the risks entailed in terms of comprehension and interpretation. More

9. In France, this question has been dealt with by, for instance, Barthélémy, 2000 or by Ion, 1997. In a completely different research field, this is also what we observed in Rio de Janeiro during the 1990s. See Goirand, 2000.

10. Some exceptions should be mentioned, such as the research done by Da Costa Neves, 1999.

particularly, I will be referring to the debate provoked by the current institutionalisation of social movements in Latin America. The latter being limited, the need for urgent renewal of todayís models available for examining the social movements on that continent may be emphasised. To my way of thinking, reassessing the way in which they have been considered and observed since the 1970s is an essential and necessary step towards analysing and understanding the mobilizations that have arisen since this century began: *piqueteros* in Argentina, Indian movements in Bolivia and Ecuador, the Landless Workers Movement (MST) in Brazil, transnational opposition to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), or Puebla Panama Plan, post-election mobilizations and opposition to the opening of the capital of Pemex in Mexico, regionalist movements in Bolivia, demands for justice in Argentina and Chile… such are the many mobilizations for whose observation it may seem useful to reassess available models of analysis.

Observing "New Social Movements", from Europe to Latin America

"Basismo" in Latin America, from the 1970s to the 1990s

In Latin America, when referring to mobilizations, the expression "popular movement" has often been preferred to that of "new social movements". With those words, militants and scholars meant at the same time the middle class, the working class and rural workers' organisations, or the inhabitants of deprived neighbourhoods. By so doing, they were referring to the restructuring of social links in the lower ranks of societies. The term "popular" has been preferred to that of "proletariat" or "people" because it refers less to a class representation of societies, defined by positions in the production system, than to their being structured in terms of power and status. If "popular" is sometimes used as a synonym for "people", it is mainly with the meaning of "poor", with a lower position in the social hierarchy of power and income. The English phrase "grass-roots" refers to it explicitly. The expression "base popular movements" stands for mobilizations that are essentially led by the urban poor, sometimes by rural workers, whose heterogeneous demands have been focused on the issues of living conditions, public services and social rights[11].

The rise of *Basismo* in Latin America came about as a twin process. First, the liberalization of political systems since the late 1970s has made it possible for demands to be voiced. But above all, these demands

11. Willem Assies (1994) shows how mobilization approaches have been structured around the notion of "popular movement". Insofar as they take into account social composition and the demands of mobilizations, these definitions are more restrictive than the one that François Chazel suggested in 1992, for instance. At that time, he defined a "social movement " as "a collective enterprise of protest and contention aiming at imposing change -of variable importance- on the social and/or political structure by resorting often, but not always exclusively, to non-institutional means " (Chazel, 1975).

were based on the construction of a new frame for understanding and interpreting social and political inequalities – a frame emerging from grass-roots movements which redefined the deprivation of social rights as illegitimate discrimination[12]. As conflicts on the meaning of social and political inequalities, these mobilizations helped to re-interpret injustices. The emergence of this grass-roots collective action was based on two processes: turning immediate material issues such as housing and urban infrastructure into political demands; becoming aware of the common position of popular groups *vis a vis* situations of basic needs; hence it was related to the creation of an "injustice frame" through a new awareness of the illegitimacy of deprivation. The notion of "urban deprivation" used by the Brazilian Renato Boschi refers to the unjust position in urban centres of the deprived population whose marginal situation is related to the illegitimate denial of rights (Boschi, 1987).

Some elements can be reviewed here so as to briefly clarify the historical construction process of these movements in Latin America. Since the late 1970s, throughout the continent, contentious movements have been organised among popular groups, in various sectors: association-run child care centres, food co-ops, soup kitchens (most of the time run by women); protests against the cost of living in Brazil, demands for free medical care, opposition to the demolition policy in the *favelas*; claims for the legalisation of land ownership by the inhabitants of informal urban neighbourhoods, or by Indian communities in rural areas, or also by the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement since 1981. Among the middle classes, other movements focused on different issues, such as

12. David Snow et al. (1986) have shown that the members of a social movement accomplish an operation of definition of a situation, which partly relies on its interpretation as unacceptable, questionable, and unfair. "By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective. So conceptualized, it follows that frame alignment is a necessary condition for movement participation ".

civil rights movements in the countries of the Southern Cone, feminist movements which prioritised birth control rights and gender parity, or the movement opposing election fraud in Mexico[13].

The rationale for the rise of mobilization at that period is based on several factors. Firstly, the role of Catholic parishes was essential to the structuring of oppositions to authoritarian regimes, but also to the training and politicising of young militants who set up local social movement organisations. Since 1968 and the Latin American bishop's conference in Medellín, national churches have created a new space of political opposition that did not exist before. Partly influenced by liberation theology, some Catholic priests took part in channelling and supporting the demands of Indian populations, at the same time as others gave their support to guerrillas, namely Bishop Ernesto Cardenal in Sandinist Nicaragua, for instance. In the shantytowns of big cities as well as in the most deprived rural regions, some priests have encouraged the politicising of militants and helped to structure their first actions[14].Church Base Communities – places for gatherings and discussions organised by progressive priests – have represented spaces of socialization and politicization that have vastly contributed to emphasising the values of participation, respect and justice, values that were very present in *Basismo* in the 1980s, particularly in the neighbourhood movements, as mentioned by Paulo Krische in 1991[15].

13. On feminism and reproductive rights, see Marques-Pereira and Raes, (2002). On the movement against election fraud in Mexico, see Combes, 2004. For a wide panorama of mobilizations in the 1980s, see Eckstein, 2001.
14. During our own research on the individual careers of the leaders of associations in Rio de Janeiro and on those of militants in the Worker's party in the North East of Brazil, it has been possible to remark how often political socialization appeared in Catholic organisations such as the *Favelasí Pastoral* or the *Rural Pastoral*, in the1970s. For a comparison of the role played by Catholic churches in the different countries, see Levine and Mainwaring, 1989.
15. "The resocialization process promoted by the CEBs sustained motivations that promoted democratic action and awareness among neighborhood leaders ", Krischke, 1991, p. 193.

Secondly, the coinciding occurrence of gradual liberalisation on the part of the authoritarian regimes, the dying out of ideologies and revolutionary armed groups, and the violent economic crisis of the 1980s, accounts for the new organisational forms taken up by mobilizations, however divergent they might be in nature. Since the 1980s, these changes first took the form of the weakening and dismantling of state corporativisms which had long been used as mobilization frames by the heads of national-popular regimes[16]. Simultaneously, associations and NGOs have become important channels of social and political participation for middle and lower classes, often supported by the members of the professional classes, social workers, youth workers, lawyers or doctors. On that subject, Susan Eckstein showed the co-existence of quite diverse collective action repertories. For that period she makes a distinction between, on one hand, hunger riots, lootings and land invasions, and on the other, strikes led by major unions, huge political meetings and new commitment to new left-wing parties like the Brazilian PT and the Mexican PRD. To explain this opposition, Susan Eckstein argues that the forms adopted by contention depended, in the 1980s, on the rate of industrialization, on the structure of the union system and social inequalities, and how open the political system was, in each of the countries of the continent. She also demonstrated how the politicization of demands varied according to the social status of the mobilized groups. The middle and upper classes have made institutional requests and demands for political democratization, while the lower classes prioritised economic issues and living conditions. These differences found expression in the available collective action repertories for the various groups .Using the examples of Bolivia, Peru and Mexico, Susan Eckstein shows that economically-dominated popular groups have tended more than

16. For a comparative analysis of the change from State corporatisms to pluralist systems, see: Oxhorn, 1998, and Levitsky and Mainwaring, 2006.

others to organise contention in the streets insofar as their capacity for influencing politics rested on field mobilization rather than on formal (for instance, partisan) mediations (Eckstein, 2001). While stressing his dissent with the class perspective adopted by Susan Eckstein, David Slater, however, underlined in 1994 some specific aspects of the battles fought in Latin America by popular groups, who gave a strong territorial and social meaning to democratic commitment, far from the electoral arena (Slater, 2004).

What is "new"? Sociologies of values and identities

With respect to Europe and North America, examination of the social movements of the years 1960 to 1980 revolved around a few central issues which were less present in Latin America. Scholars focused on three major questions: the resources and strategies of social movement organisations; values linked to demands and how they were related to social changes; finally the disparity and fluidity of collective action organisations and of the social space of mobilizations. Indeed, at first sight, the "newness" of these social movements seemed to reside in organisational as well as ideological characteristics. Less structured than traditional workers' movements, asserting demands of autonomy in relation to states, parties and unions, they were no longer exclusively related to production or class, but they also contended the existing social order by making demands unrelated to material issues. Observers also highlighted the link between these mobilizations and the changes of values and main social cleavages, as well as with the construction of specific identities. Those two approaches, through values and through identities, have been widely adopted by Latin American analysts.

Firstly, some European and North American analysts of new social movements have underlined the close link that exists between the in-depth transformation process in Western societies and the characteristics of the organisation of these mobilizations. They are sometimes unsta-

ble, often locally circumscribed and fragmented, and most of the time far from the traditional forms of commitment. According to Ronald Inglehart's insight (1984), the essential characteristic of these movements consisted of their emphasis on values, identity, social recognition, respect for individuals, human rights, living conditions, as well as priority given to the participation in decision-making processes. While demands for the necessities of life, especially those concerning salaries, were no longer the most central issues of these mobilizations, the latter have at the same time contributed to the politicising of daily life and social relationships. Revolving around issues linked to environment protection, gender, sexual behaviour and moral values, these demands have been related to the political questions of freedom of speech and association, social rights and fight against discriminations.

Ronald Inglehart has demonstrated that the common denominator and the "newness" of these social movements was the striving to construct a new society, the rejection of material values related to production, income and consumption, and the championing of values such as autonomy and individual freedom. In these movements, the middle class was predominant, even if its social composition was heterogeneous[17]. They acquired cohesion through socially-constructed identities which aimed at doing away with class belonging, so as to make way for cross-class identities such as gender, skin colour and sexual choices. As

17. The research led by Ronald Inglehart clearly shows that the groups defending post-materialist values are mostly composed of individuals who have always had secure lives, physically and economically. Following this observation, the division existing in some Latin American social movements can be partly explained. For instance, in feminist circles, there is a clear-cut opposition between the issues that middle and upper class women fight for, which are indeed related to post-materialism, and the demands expressed by groups coming from the lower classes – these demands being more immediate and concrete. A distinction can be made, for instance, between the defence of gender parity in politics and the fight against gender discriminations, on one hand, and demands for improving maternal and infant care or child-minding systems, on the other. See Marques-Pereira and Raes, 2002.

for commitment, other issues have been strongly linked to the question of identities: the pursuit of self-esteem and dignity, and the "participation" discourse (Offe, 1985). According to Ronald Inglehart's famous work, the rise of these mobilizations points to the redefinition of essential social cleavages in today's societies[18]. He has also shown that the dimension opposing materialism and post-materialism could, since the 1960s, account for the setting of new challenges on the political agenda, and was related to party re-alignments. According to Ronald Inglehart, in Western Europe "the rise of post materialism has placed existing party re-alignments under chronic stress", forcing a reshaping of party systems; changes whose patterns are well-known, with respect to Western Europe today (Inglehart, 1984)[19].

Secondly, Latin American analysts have often, like their European colleagues, paid attention to the heterogeneous, unstable, if not erratic structure of mobilizations. According to the words of Alberto Melucci's, these mobilizations have brought about the construction of large movement spaces inside the "imperfectly outlined haziness" of occasional sympathisers, much larger than the core of committed activists (Melucci, 1983)[20]. Backed up by decentralised and adaptable organisations, participation in the new social movements has been characterised by shifting, divergent, often informal, discontinuous forms, marked by the rejection of the dominant interest representation systems. These social movements have been sustained by a vast number of micro-

18. According to him, "the fact that these movements have been on the centre stage of contemporary politics shows that there has been a long-term evolution in the priorities of Western populations in terms of values", Inglehart, 1984.
19. It is a thesis, discussed for instance by Mair, Müller and Plasser, 2004. We note that the partisan systems in Latin America saw new social-democratic parties emerging in the 1980s and then consolidating in the 1990s. As they won the elections in the years 2000, some of their leaders reasserted their loyalty to the founding values of their mobilizations of the preceding decade, through the setting up of institutions of "participatory" democracy.
20. The notion of "movement space " has been taken up by Mathieu, 2002.

organisations, local associations, “diversified and autonomous units”, of a “scattered, multiform, erratic nature”, which took up a social space that had “unclear boundaries and fluctuating density” (Melucci , 1983). A large movement space has gradually emerged, on the basis of sometimes very specific demands voiced by each organisation, and on that of the circulation of individuals and groups inside crisscrossed mobilization networks[21].

Inside these spaces made up of informal fluctuating networks, connecting individuals to local micro-organisations, strategic alliances or pure and simple solidarity have been limited if not problematic. According to this analysis, the influence of this type of mobilization on political and social systems was indirect, working through the random spreading of common behaviour models or shared representations .With this outlook, Alberto Melucci, in the 1980s, referred to social movements as “systems of action and opportunities, and fields of possibilities and limits”[22]. Generally, behind the apparent cohesion of a social movement, motivations, representations and collective behaviour are linked to heterogeneous or even contradictory ways of acting in politics, particularly in the lower classes[23]. So it is uncertain whether these discrepant actions lead to political constructions.

Also in the 1980s, Jean-François Bayart stressed about Africa, from a different perspective, that the rise of social movements coming from the lower ranks leads to the question of “the uncertain unification of these

21. According to this perspective, the movement space encompasses not only formal organizations, but also the network of “ informal “ relations which brings together individuals from the centre and the groups to the wider space of participants and “users “ of services and cultural goods produced by the movementî, Alberto Melucci, 1983.
22. For Alberto Melucci (1985) again, “what empirically is called a ‘social movement’ is a system of action, connecting plural orientations and meanings “, if not diverging.
23. This is what we observed in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s. See Goirand, 2000.

divergent and pinpoint actions into a social movement that would cover the surface of the historical action system"(Bayart, 1992). As for Latin America in the years 2000, where, for instance, the mobilizations of Argentinean *piqueteros* are related to a hazy organisation, the question of the unification of the social movement and its political meaning remains topical[24]. Denis Merklen has pointed out that the heterogeneous and territorial characteristics of this movement are related to the circulation of a body of representations and political practices which outline a new "politicity" of the lower classes (Merklen, 2006). There, the unity of the social movement is derived from the fact that individuals and groups revolve around the same action system: they share similar goals and symbols, if not identity claims, and they move in a shared militant space. In spite of the fragmentation of organisations and symbols, individual exchanges and pinpoint gatherings make up an unstable unity of both representations and social networks of interaction.

If we grant this point, then the associations in the poorer neighbourhoods in Brazil in the 1980s did shape a social movement. Indeed, what strikes one first when analysing this is the totally erratic modes of political action of their leaders, the lack of unity in the associative haze and the unidentifiable political impact (Goirand, 2000). The concept of "system of action" may precisely account for it. The interpersonal links between these micro-organisations, the common understanding they have of their position in the city, the common use of rights and speeches on social justice and the use of a shared collective action repertory, all point to a social movement.

More generally speaking, the social movements which have developed in Latin America since the late 1970s have been deemed "new" and compared to those of the North, due to their closeness to post-materialism, to their reliance on speeches focusing on their demands for dignity and

24. On this movement, see Svampa and Pereyra, 2003.

respect, the fight against discrimination, and the reference to "participation". Yet, these Latin American movements are specific in that they gave priority to demands concerning concrete needs, they emerged mostly in the lower classes, and they had limited effects on party re-alignment until the first years of this century[25]. The common denominator between these various mobilizations – their structure and their organisation – has finally been considered secondary for the construction of analysis. Indeed, the instability, fragmentation and disparity of Latin American movements have been deplored more than systematically studied, for instance in terms of resources, modes of action, or opportunities. Thus, in the political context of the construction of representative governments, the scientific analysis of these social movements has taken a different path from the one followed elsewhere heretofore.

25. This is what has been highlighted in a few recent publications on the Left in Latin America : *Problèmes d'Amérique Latine*, 2004-2005 ; *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 2005.

Latin American social sciences and new social movements

Often quoted in Latin America, Jürgen Habermas' work on one hand, and Alain Touraine's on the other, have made a lasting mark on social sciences, and more particularly on research into social movements. This research has essentially stressed the evaluation of their "transforming" potential, the analysis of their relationship to the social structure of dependant economies, and their opposition to authoritarian State systems. However, as the sociologist Ruth Cardoso pointed out in 1983, "at the moment when French theoreticians, our mentors, were speaking of qualitative changes in the State, (…) we, Latin-Americans, to explain similar processes, focused on criticizing the authoritarianism of our governments" (Corrêa Leite Cardoso, 1983). Alain Touraine doubted the existence of "urban movements", insofar as they did not rely on any unified organisation, did not take part in the creation of class consciousness, and therefore could not, in his opinion, promote a major political change (Touraine, 1985). Besides this reflection on the limits of political change, inspired by those movements, it is around the question of autonomy in relation to the social and political structures of authoritarianism that research on social movements approached the issue in Latin America. And it is also on the basis of this issue that research tried to assess their capacity for changing political systems and societies.

The issue of autonomy

The repressions led by authoritarian governments since the 1960s, the end of Castrist guerrillas and the weakening of the communist parties have not only created a political vacuum among the Left, but they have also been connected to the mistrust, on the part of the actors of mobilizations, towards State corporatism, populisms and all attempted "instrumentalization". All this led social movements organisations to

present autonomy not only as a strategy, but also as a value in itself. Being often hostile to traditional organisations of mobilization, particularly to unions and political parties, associative movements have often valued those that were labelled as "community" organisations. To a large extent, political sociology in Latin America has then made this question its own. Attention was paid mostly to the relation between social movements and political institutions, and autonomy was presented not only as specific to the new social movements, as a goal set by the actors, but also as a political necessity. Seeking an alternative path between authoritarianism, populism and revolution, many analysts have considered the autonomous movements of civil societies as a possible source of social innovation[26]. Most of the time, examination has ignored the perspectives opened up elsewhere by the theories of mobilization, and focused on a debate dealing with the questions raised by social movements themselves; a debate that was necessitated by the political emergency of the moment, in which intellectuals were absorbed. Three issues prevailed. Firstly, political participation was requested by social movements and it was also the subject of recommendations for the renewal of local public action. There are few observations totally devoid of normative positioning on this issue. Secondly, the determination of social movements to question traditional mediations handled by parties and unions was deemed a necessary element towards the democratization of political practices. Lastly, the organisation of social movements on a local basis backed up the references to "communities"; references that were disseminated by local actors, public authorities on different levels, and by observers.

According to Ruth Cardoso, whose analysis seems fairly representative**,** the issue at stake with these movements, in the absence of clear revolutionary purposes or even of explicit democratic demands, was not a radical transformation of political systems and societies, but the politi-

26. Like Hellman, 1992 and Sader, 1991.

cal inclusion process to which they contributed. In 1983, Ruth Cardoso stated that, "through their grievances, neighbourhood movements are unlikely to be capable of great transformations, but if we consider them as the expression of a new identity, they may be regarded as a new pawn in the political game" (Cardoso, 1983).

The debate on identities

The assessment of the change brought about by "base" movements highlighted their contribution not politically but socio-culturally. Their implantation in the realm of civil societies and their autonomy *vis à vis* the political authorities has been interpreted as relating to a process of constructing identity, as well as a way of inventing new social relations in daily life. According to Willem Assies and Tillman Evers "these fragments of new social practices" have taken part in the construction of an emancipating dignity for popular social categories, however fragile their organisations may have been. "The essence of these movements is, in my view, their capacity to generate germs of a new social subjectivity –new as much in content as in self-consciousness", reflected Tillman Evers (1985). From this point of view, these mobilizations were grounded in an affirmation of a set of values of a new kind in politics, such as equality, citizenship, or participation, based on participants gaining self-esteem.

While the local actors of social movements would not describe their demands other than through immediate, concrete and specific phrasing, observers opted for underlining their implicit ethical content, expressed in a threefold demand : recognition of the dignity of the poor, the granting of social rights and citizens' participation. All of this triggered a vast array of discourses on citizenship and participation, based on a "sociology of the subject" which saw in "base" social movements an element of self-assertion on the part of the poor, as autonomous social "subjects", possessing rights. For example, in 1994, Evelina Dagnino thought that new social movements contributed to "the invention of a new soci-

ety" and to the shaping of a "new conception of citizenship". She also thought that demanding "the right to have rights" had been a stepping stone for the creation of a new social subject (…) fighting for recognition" (Dagnino, 1994). In the same way, Eder Sader (1989) announced the arrival on the political scene of "new political subjects", autonomous and independent[27]. It is from this perspective, partly inspired by the works of Jürgen Habermas, that these social movements were regarded as taking part in the democratisation process of societies, because they made it possible for ideas to spread in the midst of "a public realm not pervaded by power", where "associative practices have made up the social substructure of the public sphere" (Habermas, 1993).

Shaped by the search for "another" democracy, between liberalism and Marxism, by the pressing need for reflection on rights, and by a strong tradition of political intervention on the part of intellectuals, Latin-American sociology has adopted an interpretive approach, which only recently found a new development. For instance, in 2003, Evelina Dagnino no longer restricted herself to underlining the cultural aspects of citizen construction, she also noted the strategic characteristic of discourses on citizenship[28]. More recent work on the "construction" of identities, or even on the invention of memory and roots, do show how the strategies of mobilization were already structured by them in the 1980s. This is the case – as demonstrated by Jean-François Véran – of Brazilian inland rural workers, who had first unionised, and who re-discovered that they were descendants of runaway slaves in the 1990s after the Constitution had granted a right of land ownership to that category of population. Bolivian peasants and miners have also realised what an

27. Up to now, analyses in terms of subject, identity and culture have remained prevalent, like in the analysis by Swords, 2007, or in Garretón, 2002.

28. Even if she doesn't refer to resources, she admits that "the reference to citizenship has provided common ground and an articulatory principle for an immense diversity of social movements ". For them, it has been "a crucial weapon " and a "powerful link ".

advantage could be gained by mobilizing as Indians, after several decades of mobilization in unions (Véran, 2003 ; Lavaud, 2005).

Even if Latin-American sociologists have not all been militants, their published work has sometimes echoed the claims for recognition of the actors of social movements. At the time when regimes were changing, highlighting what was at stake politically in the mobilizations has often been the same as calling for the democratisation of institutions and creating participation procedures[29]. To explain the frequency of these approaches, some fragmentary hypotheses can be made, and furthered elsewhere. During the authoritarian period, many academics and intellectuals in exile created social networks which then proved favourable for the spreading of this research position, half-way between analysis and political action. One noteworthy point, for instance, is the role played since the 1970s until today by the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales de Paris, in the countries of the Southern Cone. Following Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth's perspective, we could assume – though it remains to be proved- that the academics who had attended that School approached social movements with the conceptual tools of sociology they had been taught (Dezalay and Garth, 2002).When they came back from exile, analysing the political moment in terms of political and social change was essential because it conferred a meaning to their commitment to the construction of political debates and institutions.

However, the consequence of approaching social movements in terms of autonomy, social transformation and identity claims was that the decline of street mobilizations by the mid-1990s was considered a receding process, while their increasing proximity to left-wing parties was construed as a loss of autonomy[30]. On the contrary, closer examination

29. See, for instance, Calderón, 1995.
30. "Grass-roots movements can (and often do) disappear from the scene as autonomous actors once they have decided to support, have formally allied themselves with, or in some other fashion cast their lot with political parties ", Hellman (1992).

can also indicate that the mobilizations of the 1970s did not always provoke a brutal break-up in political systems, and were often shaped in close contact with conventional militant organisations. Behind the issues of autonomy and identities, what prevails is a multiple interaction dynamic between the various actors of "contentious politics". It is confirmed by the individual career of militants, by their "multipositionality" and by the converging of contention towards certain organisations[31]. Because of the prevalence of identity and cultural approaches, other processes remained mostly unexplored, such as the political professionalisation of militants, the distance created between leaders and simple members within organisations, the social rise of militants, or also their demobilization and resignation from organisations[32]. Thus, the sociology of collective action organisations in Latin-America, however rich it may have been, still remains to be enriched.

Social movements, political parties and institutions

As a matter of fact, the autonomy of the new social movements, even if it did exist, was mostly a temporary situation, related to the very specific and transitory context created by changes in political regimes. Outside of the revolutionary Left that was weakened, nonexistent or discredited, the mobilizations started organising without, if not against, the existing political institutions. In a still authoritarian but already liberalising environment, the social movements have made possible the expression of social demands which developing party systems could not yet mediate. The creation of new left-wing parties, far from representing a loss of autonomy for social movements, has sometimes relied on their initiatives. Since the 1980s, the creation of "movement-parties" – as in

31. See MacAdam, Tarrow and Tilly , 2001.
32. For a comparative perspective, see the works assembled by Fillieule, 2005.

the case of the Mexican PRD, the Brazilian PT, the Uruguayan Frente Amplio and the Bolivian MAS – have enabled some social movements to join in the political sphere, either as organisations or through their militants' individual career.

In the early years of this century, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly suggested extending the field of research into the sociology of mobilization, by analysing "contentious politics" or "politics of conflict", which takes into account the continual interactions between institutional and non-institutional spheres, the criss-crossing of actors, identities and mobilizations, as well as the individual joining in or resigning from organisations (MacAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2008). Collective action therefore comes about in a *continuum*, in terms of social networks and relations to institutions, and in historical terms. Parties and friendly organisations make up a "mobilization space" with blurred social boundaries, composed of militant networks inside which individuals come and go. In her research work on the PRD in Mexico, Hélène Combes has shown that the creation of this party in 1989 was based on the coming together of militant actors originating from various organisations. "More than by territorial propagation, the PRD was made up by territorial aggregation of social organisations which were turned into a real militants' management system" (Combes, 2006). In this way, in the 1990s, a considerable percentage of the members of the party were originally militants from contentious organisations. According to the author, when the PRD was created, only a quarter of its leaders had not been activists in the preceding period. Until 1994, the proportion of militants coming from the social movements had increased, and amounted to half the leaders of the PRD. Later on, the organisation, rocked by battles between tendencies, attempted to consolidate its cohesion, for instance by introducing internal elections, its purpose being the "shaping up of the party" (Combes, 2006).

In many ways, the creation of the Workers' party in Brazil followed a similar path. It was a congregation of numerous social movement organ-

isations and small extreme left parties which evolved into "tendencies" within it. The PT, during its first twenty years of existence, experienced great difficulties in unifying its strategies, discourse and organisation. The origin of the party is not a split of the only opposition party tolerated by the military regime until the reintroduction of the multiple party system in December 1979, but a political project regarded as new[33]. As the founding members of the PT refused to go back to the partisan system of the republican period of 1945-64, they aimed to transcribe, in their political action, the diversified grievances of independent unions that arose during the strikes of 1978 and 1979. It was also a way of uniting actors that came into politics during the authoritarian period. This party, being a strategic means to unite oppositions rather than an instrument for the mediation of demands, was conceived by its founders as a necessary resource to bring fragmented movements together and to transfer their fight to the political realm. Our research in the state of Pernambuco in Brazil confirms that the creation of the PT did follow a "territorial aggregation" process, comparable to the one mentioned by Hélène Combes concerning the PRD[34]. The members of the PT, who had joined the party by way of social militancy, have maintained, during their whole militant life, a twin commitment: partisan and social. In the case of the unionists of the regional hydro-electricity company or metalworking industry for instance, partisan militancy became rooted in mobilizations led in the work place and it was backed up in its organisation by resources provided by the unions, in terms of membership, logistics or legitimacy. More generally, the organisation of the PT bespoke, during its first years of existence, the priority given by

33. On the creation of that party, see Keck, 1986-87; on the career of some leaders of legal opposition to the military regime, see the interviews published by de Moraes Ferreira et al., 2001.
34. For this research in the North-East of Brazil, semi-guided interviews, archive research and observation have been assembled.

its members to union involvement through its “cellular” organisation *(nucleos*) on the work place. The creation of the PT in the early 1980s is thus described by unionists as a means of “going further”, that is to say, on the one hand, to consolidate mobilization in the work place by making general political demands, and on the other, to take over representative institutions in order to increase the resources available for collective action. Here, the hypothesis concerning the “multipositionality” of militants and the *continuum* of collective action shed light on the strategies of social movements of the “base” as well as on the careers of their militants. It also suggests that the question of autonomy is less part of the historical strategy of contentious organisations than of discourses, academic or militant.

The dwindling and rebirth of the new social movements in Latin America

Is institutionalisation a failure?

By the mid-1990s, observers of Latin American social movements were struck not only by the decline of mobilizations, but also by their very limited achievements. The formation of representative governments was not immediately based on a complete democratization of societies which were proving more and more violent and unequal[35]. Once the concrete demands of the local micro-organisations born in the 1980s had been satisfied, many of them lost the power to express demands and mobilize. This demobilization process can be explained by a great number of factors, which we have perceived in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. First, certain material demands have been complied with. People remarked: "now we have everything !..." Then, fatigue and wariness must also be taken into account, together with a wish to devote one's time more to private matters (Goirand, 2000). Drawing data from documentary production of social movement organisations in Brazil, Ana Maria Doimo has shown that there have been fewer mobilizations in the 1990s than in the 1980s (Doimo, 1995). Confronted by this erosion, left-wing observers, intellectuals and academics have expressed their disenchantment and disillusion which were as great as the expectations they had had a few years before for popular mobilizations. Many of them, emphasising the failures and weaknesses of mobilizations, have bemoaned the limits of the social change imposed by *the* popular movement (in the singular) which turned out to be short-lived and jingoistic (Jacobi, 1990). Considered as a loss of autonomy and identity, if not as a surrendering of principles, the institutionalisation of the new social movements was thus regarded as a failure.

35. This is what is shown in the works published in Mendel, O'Donnell and Pinheiro, 2000.

So, the dwindling of the new social movements has been much commented upon and written about since the mid-1990s. Although this analysis is relevant as regards the decline of contentious mobilizations that started in the 1980s, it is however incomplete, for at least two reasons. Firstly, because it is based on the premise of an essential opposition between social movements and institutional politics which takes into account neither the acquired knowledge from standard research work on political participation which proves that committed individuals are also those who tend most to take part in conventional politics, nor the "complementarity of protest and conventional political action," as Jack Goldstone (2003) wrote. Secondly, because a closer look at the individual careers of militants and at the social and political spaces they occupy will make it possible to bring nuance to the assessment of "dwindling" or failure. It shows to what extent the cycle of protest, started in the 1980s, has on one hand created the possibility of training for new political and administrative personnel[36]**,** while on the other hand, it has made it possible for certain fundamental rights to be acknowledged. Furthermore, the early years of this century have confirmed that this protest cycle is probably not yet over.

Let us note that the institutionalisation of social movements started in the 1970s doesn't lead to a unique interpretation. Regarding neighbourhood associations, for instance, there are two rival interpretations. The first highlights the characteristics of these micro-organisations that are hardly (if at all) politicised, that are evanescent and heterogeneous, focused mainly on specific concrete demands, for the sole benefit of their members. From this perspective, institutionalisation may have meant clientelization or even demobilization. Secondly, these organisations are inserted into a large system of action created by the great circulation of their militants and by their numerous stances between social movement,

36. *Problèmes d'Amérique Latine* has published a special issue on this theme : « Le renouvellement du personnel politique », no.59, winter 2005-2006.

political parties, local public administrations and social work. Besides, Sidney Tarrow (1994) has demonstrated that the "cycles of protest" start, but also continue with changes in the structures of political opportunity. According to him, the end of "cycles of protest" is characterised by reshufflings in institutional politics, and particularly by the integration of the leaders of contentious groups into political systems. Their new positioning does not systematically prevent them from remaining faithful to their former militant commitment. Jack Goldstone believes that "understanding how social movements give rise to parties, shape political alignments, and interact with normal political institutions has become essential to comprehending political dynamics" (Goldstone, 2003).

In Latin-America in the early years of this century, electoral victories of left-wing parties which have developed in a contentious environment since the 1980s are related to that process (Dabène, 2005). In fact, the dynamics of these reshufflings are numerous. Firstly, a large number of demands coming from popular movements have been placed onto the national political agendas, and are today a matter of public politics. Such is the case for instance, of Indian claims in Andean countries that all adopted new constitutions in the 1900s and 2000s, and which recognised the multicultural nature of their nations (Gros, 2003). Secondly, a large number of militants from social movements have entered politics. Two famous former unionists are today at the head of Bolivia and Brazil, for instance. At a local level, the leaders of left-wing parties, when they are in legislative office, profit through a strong connection with associative and unionist groups[37]. Thirdly, some of the leaders of associations have been able to turn the expertise acquired in the mobilizations into professional resources, for instance among left-wing municipal administrations. In the city of Recife in Brazil, which has been governed by the

37. Concerning the Brazilian PT, in the North East, we mention these questions in Dabène, 2005.

PT since 2001, many former militants of associations are responsible for municipal services for social housing, urban development and participatory production of the budget. Throughout the whole continent, the generalised introduction of municipal policies said to be "participatory" is also a constituent of this reshuffling dynamic since it institutionalised new channels of mediation for social demands and boosted the evolution of movements into routine. However, research remains insufficient as to the way these participation and consultation devices contribute to transforming the logics of local government and open up new spaces for political action. All in all, the dynamics of mobilization rely upon these renewed configurations of local power struggles, and upon this twin history in which institutional structures meet individual careers ; dynamics whose detailed analysis remains to be carried out.

Contention in the early years of this century

There has been a decrease in the frequency of social science publications on Latin-American social movements since the late 1990s, while at the same time, mobilizations have again intensified, and social and political environment have been undergoing radical changes. With the liberalization of political as well as economic regimes, not only the issues at stake, but also the framework of mobilizations has been redefined. That is indeed what is emphasised in certain collective research works published since 2000. Following Susan Eckstein, the dynamics of erosion can be differentiated from those of consolidation of contention. The first concerns mainly the workers' movement which went on declining, as witnessed by the decrease in the number of strikes during the 1990s[38]. While mobilizations keep moving away from the work sphere,

38. For a general overview on mobilizations in the early years of this century, see Eckstein, 2001 and *Latin American Perspectives*, 2007.

to become more territorial, and constructed by asserting cultural identities (Merklen, 2002), land invasions in urban areas are becoming less frequent, and the Catholic Church has returned to faith and religious action. And yet, at the same time, other mobilizations seem to follow different dynamics and to be consolidating: collective action repertories are still becoming enriched, with peaceful long marches on capitals, like the one that converged on Quito in November 2002; movements for the defence of human rights are not abating in Chile and Argentina, where they have succeeded in cancelling the amnesty laws; Indianist organisations have proved their capacity for mobilization in Bolivia since the election of Evo Morales as president in 2006; the protest against political classes undermined the political regimes, in Argentina in 2001, in Ecuador in 2004 and 2007 with the cry of: "Out of here, all of them!..." (*¡Que se vayan todos!...),* while Mexicans began occupying public places to protest against the results of the presidential election or against the legitimacy of the Governor of the state of Oaxaca…

All these mobilizations take place in a renewed environment offering numerous resources to collective action organisations. Firstly, in spite of the limits of democratizations, national political systems are more favourable to the expression of their claims and to the mediation of their demands, as mentioned above. Secondly, the movements created since the 1970s have increasingly taken part in transnational networks which contribute to their legitimization, to spreading their mottos and to the forming of multi-level alliances[39].

After the middle years of the current decade, these mobilizations occasioned some publications which show that the identity perspective still remains attractive. As Jon Shefner complained in 2004, in

39. Concerning this point, Sikkink (2005) offers a model of analysis drawn from her observation of mobilizations linked to transitional justice in Argentina and Spain. Her perspective is interestingly enriched by a case study, by Stewart (2004).

the review *Mobilization,* "the new contentious politics framework has not penetrated much of the current work on Latin America", and the cultural approach of *Basismo,* as adopted by Sonia Alvarez and Arturo Escobar for instance, remains tenacious whatever the damage caused by the neo-liberal politics may have been for the recognition of social right (Schefner, 2004) [40]. However, diversified theoretical approaches are gradually replacing the preceding one, for instance in the research led by Javier Auyero on riots in Argentina, or in the special issues published in 2004 by *Mobilization,* and in 2007 by *Latin American perspectives* (Auyero, 2001) [41]. The examination of these mobilizations should no longer simply consist of assessing their impact or the meaning of contention, but instead requires the use of other conceptual and methodological tools of collective action sociology: not only the identification of resources and strategies mobilized by the actors, the examination of contention practices and the analysis of the logics of organisation, but also an observation of militant careers, of the social and political space taken up by the movements… these are all necessary entries to renew our approach to the social movements in Latin America.

40. Besides, in my teaching practice, I have often noticed how appealing this perspective may be for students - a perspective which often addresses their distress as regards the harshness or even the violence of social reality in Latin America, but which at the same time comforts their confusion between militant discourse and scientific observation.
41. Auyero, 2001; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley, 2003; *Mobilization*, 2004; *Latin American Perspectives*, 2007. Moreover, the *Revue internationale de politique comparée* has scheduled a special issue for 2010 entitled : "Répertoires d'action collective en Amérique latine ".

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