VOICES OF MOVEMENTS:

A Historical Perspective on Collective Action Movements

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This paper explores collective action movements (CAMs). To understand the complexities of the concept, CAMs are defined and their mobilization explored from a historical perspective.

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Abstract:

Prior to the 1789 French Revolution, revolutions and collective action movements were not differentiated clearly in both practice and scholarship (Goldstone, 2003). The causes of these collective action movements were vaguely explored and analyzed. For example, Machiavelli (1513) argued that the masses could rebel against their “Prince” if he did not maintain his values and virtue. Such conditions can lead to a collective action movement to mobilize against the prince. Since then, historical icons such as Rousseau and Voltaire argued that due to the discontent between the social classes, a clash between them might occur. Goldstone (2003), however, argued this “misery breeds revolt” ideology might not encompass all aspects that breed collective action movement. This research is a continuation of Goldstone’s contention towards the old explanation of collective action movements (CAM). This paper will first define and differentiate collective action movements and all that fall under the umbrella of the term. It also explores how these definitions developed from past revolutionary theories and actions. It will articulate different disciplinary perspectives on causes and tools of initiating and maintaining resources to sustain collective action movements. It is important to discuss past collective action movements in order to understand how and why non-state actors rely on cultural agents to frame their political agenda.

VOICES OF MOVEMENTS

What are Collective Action Movements?

Before recalling past revolutions and rebellion, the definition of collective action movements requires clarification to comprehend the focus of this study. Huntington (1968) presented the “Western” and “Eastern” models of revolution. He argues that the “Western” model of revolution is more peaceful and modern than the “Eastern” model of revolution. He argued that Marx and Lenin revolutionized both the analysis and the practice of CAM that led to successful “Western” revolutions. The French and Russian Revolutions represent the modernization of revolutions and how populations, when faced with injustice, were expected to act (Huntington 1968). Huntington, however, fails to explicitly explain the concept of these collective actions that either lead to the “Western” or the “Eastern” models of revolution. The question then becomes, where do CAM end and revolutions begin? Although, CAM is a concept occasionally seen in the social science literature, its meaning needs clarification in existing political science. Therefore, defining each term clearly is necessary to understand the political trajectory of this paper.

A collective action movement[[1]](#footnote-1) (CAM) could be defined as an all-encompassing umbrella concept that includes the disposition of revolutionary, rebellious, and social movements. Collective actions movements is a mobilized population that seeks to become a rebellion or a driving force to change the social order of a state (Tarrow, 2011). It can be classified as violent rebellious groups, non-violent social movement, revolutionary groups, or pro-government assemblies (Tarrow, 2011). For example, Hamas was considered to have become a violent CAM in the beginning of the First intifada in Palestine in 1987, whereas, the Swaraj Party was considered a social CAM in the 1920s that supported self-rule in India (Tarrow, 2011).

A rebellion is either an unsuccessful revolution or the antecedent to a revolution. Rebellions are acts of refusing a constituted government’s laws and policies in an attempt to overthrow a regime or change its policies (Tarrow, 1998; Van Inwegen, 2011). For example, Shay’s Rebellion of 1786, which was responsible for abolishing the Articles of Confederation, did not lead to a revolution; therefore, it is classified as a rebellion (Van Inwegen, 2011). A revolution is a rebellion that is successful in radically changing political policies (Van Inwegen, 2011). Huntington (1968) further defined revolutions as “an aspect of modernization” that needs specific resources to occur and succeed. In other words, a rebellion is the ignition point and catalyst for a successful revolution, if it attained all of the appropriate resources. For example, most Tunisians rebelled against the Ben Ali regime in 2011, due to political corruption, economic inequality and lack of social reform. This action is classified as a revolution because the Tunisians were able to force Ben Ali out of office and establish and new constitution and government.

The Origins of Modern Collective Action Movements

Modern scholars developed the previous definitions of CAMS based on past revolutionary theories and actions. Therefore, recalling some of these revolutionary theories and actions could aid in illustrating a clearer picture of how the trajectory of CAMs could conclude.

To begin, Karl Marx was concerned with the development of social order by economic means and the inevitability of revolution due to class struggle (Marx, [1849]1988). The *Manifesto* *of the Communist Party* advocated for an ideal utopia, where economic equality is attainable. However, certain revolutionary steps are necessary to help individuals evolve and to be able to maintain economic parity in this utopia. In this shared work with Friedrich Engels, Marx explained how these revolutionary steps could be attained and their necessity to develop a new social order based on economic parity.

Marx ([1849]1988) classified the two socioeconomic classes in 19th century Europe, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and explained why a revolution between them is needed to progress a new social order. He argued that the proletariat would continue to clash with the bourgeoisie due to their latter economic exploitation. Brinton (1965) argues that economic strain is a cause of revolution. Yet, such economic strain is not the only cause of revolution, “People will engage in collective action, [Marx and Engels] thought, when their social [and economic] class comes into full-developed contradiction with its antagonists" (Tarrow, P.17, 2011). Although, Marx had a legitimate theory, his theory on class division is just a factor of initiation a collective action (Tilly, 1979). Marx did not account for the resources needed for a collective action to occur. He did not provide an explanation of the causes of rebellion when essential resources are missing, instead he stated that in due time a revolution will occur. Marx did not acknowledge culture as a factor in developing a CAM to establish the new social order. He implied that culture was epiphenomena to the inevitable class revolution.

Nogee (2009) and Tarrow (2011) argued that Vladimir Lenin added to Marx's argument and introduced the concept of vanguard (charismatic leadership[[2]](#footnote-2)) that will lead a rebellion into a revolution. The leadership of the revolution would portray itself as guardians of the rights of the oppressed, pushing individuals towards rebellion for the greater good. Like most revolutionary ideologies, interpretations of Marxism often fit the priming and framing of the leaders using it to establish legitimacy with their population. Lenin’s interpretation of Marxism to his proletariat class was mainly a promotion of the vanguard —elites that are the most fitted to lead a movement into the right direction.

Lenin ignited a movement against capitalism and wanted to combat it with the ideology of internationalism — a unity of the global proletariat class (Nogee, 2009). He advocated for unity of all classes, by encouraging the concept that workers were victims of industrialized capitalism and should receive support from other workers falling victim to the same economic machine. However, Lenin did not want to achieve a classless society. He understood that class struggle was inevitable and would always occur. Thus, he gave the vanguards responsibility to lead their population into revolution (Nogee, 2009). It was the duty of these vanguards to utilize specific cultural agents[[3]](#footnote-3) to unite the masses and use their social and political frustration as a catalyst to mobilize against the opposition.

Lenin assumed that the proletariat needed organization to rebel and succeed in their revolution. In 1905 and 1907, the professional working class revolted against the czarist regime’s lack of social empathy of the working class (Smith, 2002). The rebellions failed, leading Lenin to theorize that the lack of organization led the rebellions to fail. Therefore, he and his social movement entrepreneur Lev Leon Trotsky proposed that the educated elites needed to lead the people to successfully rebel against the old regime, which they eventually did, successfully, in October of 1917. Lenin neither defined the strides of revolution nor CAMs. He only relied on the desperation and discontent of the people towards their government, which caused a revolution. Scholars such as Selbin (1979), Tarrow (2011), and Gramsci (1924) have deduced that others factors of a collective action can foreshadow its success or failure.

The Structuralist Approach and Rational Choice Model

Structuralist view CAMs from a macroscopic level, Skocpol and Timberger (1979) argued that CAMS would occur based on three analytical principles: a political crisis, the “situation of the peasantry”, and the “international state system”. The first principle is similar to what revolutionaries have argued in the past. The discontent of the general population based their oppressive regimes causes a rebellion to ignite (Guevara, 1961). However, Skocpol and Trimberger (1979) discussed the relationship between state organizations and the dominant class, which is a central factor in the mobilizations of a CAM. If the socioeconomic structure is imbalanced and social reforms are limited, a CAM might propose a restructuring of the political, social, and economic structure. However, if the population is content with maintaining minimum essentials for living, CAMs will not occur. As calculated by the rational choice model, the costs and benefits of establishing a CAM are possible with a positive outcome.

Friedman (1983) defines the rational choice model as a mathematical equation for calculating the costs and benefits of a CAM or a revolution. The model argues that individuals compute the potential outcome of a CAM by subtracting the benefits from the cost of the action.[[4]](#footnote-4) Then it assesses if an individual can rebel or revolt against an oppressive regime based on the cost of the rebellion. If the benefits of developing a CAM are greater than the cost of rebelling against the oppressive regime, then the target population will establish a CAM, to challenge the opposition.

Friedman (1983) refuted the model by the use of game theory. He continues to argue that the flaw of the argument is the unpredictability of the individual and the state. The equation does not calculate the uncertainty of both factors; the First Intifada is a prime example of the flaw of the rational choice model. In December of 1987, the Palestinians in the occupied territories rebelled against the State of Israel (Khalidi, 2006). Khalidi (2006) stated that the uprising was against the extreme marginalization brought by the “iron fist” policy of Israel towards the Palestinians. Friedman (1983) would argue that based on the rational choice model the campaign would have concluded with a negative outcome. Based on the minimal resources that the Palestinian leadership acquired and the internal fighting of political parties, the Palestinians had no guaranteed outlook of success of the intifada (Khalidi, 2006). Yet, The Palestinians leadership had faith in an unrealistic victory, which led to the failure of the uprising. This example illustrated the unpredictability of the Palestinians, and their perceived irrational choice to rebel.

Resources Needed

In mobilizing CAMs, resources are necessary to progress the collective action. The rational choice model bases its calculations on resources that are necessary for succeeding in challenging a ruling opposition. Before mobilization, resources such as people, wealth, ideas, and weapons are obligatory to ignite a rebellion. Tilly (2008) illustrated the importance of these resources to achieve a collective action. Tarrow and McAdam (2004) discuss similar mobilization tactics, but both scholars differ in their description of how these resources are used than Tilly’s structural model of mobilization.

Tilly (1979) stated, “[a] revolution begins when a government previously under the control of a single, sovereign polity becomes the object of effective, competing, mutually exclusive claims from two or more separate polities. A revolution ends when a single polity […] regains control over the government” (Goldstone, P.50, 2008). He argued that when groups of people unite into a collective action, they make claims for resources and privileges from the government. When the government refutes the claims, a peaceful or violent CAM will occur. Therefore, the main purpose of a collective action is to achieve the supply and demand of resources and privileges of the masses (or of the demands of the leadership of the CAM).

People are the most important resources that a CAM needs to succeed. Guevara argued that “[g]uerrilla warfare is a people's warfare; an attempt to carry out this type of war without the population's support is a prelude to inevitable disaster” (Guevara, P.143, 1961). Tarrow and McAdam (2007) analyzed the success of revolutionaries like Guevara and concluded that the population is what provides these movements with the revolutionary push. The development of social networks will unite populations, cultural and patriotic forces will drive the collective action.

Selbin (1993) likewise argues that the use of the population is a vital resource to establish a successful CAM. He furthers his argument explaining how a polity is primed to believe a specific ideology or dogma. This allows the collective action leaders to frame certain ideas into the ideology. Tarrow (1998) adds that frames of contentious politics give value to the CAM. A frame is a simplified representation of concepts that will aid the masses to relate with goals of the collective action. Framing is "...encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment" (Tarrow, P.144, 2011). Tarrow then continues to theorize that frames are used to "interpret, define, or redefine" the core of the movement and its trajectory.

The leadership of the CAM can frame the mobilization against the unjust laws of the old regime, while plotting their own political agenda behind closed doors. The leadership is successful by selling a vague discontented perception of the old regime by relying on the “bounded rationality” of the masses. To be specific, Simon (1997) describes three factors that limit individuals’ rationality: 1) the lack of fully understanding particular consequence, 2) the inability to accurately predicting future consequences and 3) the lack of full knowledge of all alternative actions. Furthermore, he argues that each of these factors limit individuals’ rational decision-making, leading them to rely on heuristics[[5]](#footnote-5) to complete the missing information. Kilcullen (2008) explained that guerilla insurgents in Iraq would rally their population against the unjust “placement” of “Western” troop by the use of petroleum as main cause of the invasion. Often bounded rationality could be used by collective action leaders to highlighting certain ideas while discrediting some of the reality of attaining such ideas.

Framing is the concept of utilizing the flow of information to mobilize a population, in order to broadcast the desired information to them (Tarrow, 2011). For example, the Taliban framed the legitimacy of their actions towards the United States by claiming they were the vanguard of Islam and protectors/defenders of the Afghanis (Kilcullen, 2009). Leaders could manipulate a population based on the flow of information, particularly through their use of cultural agents.

These leaders create a reality that could drive a target population to rebel against their ruling regime. If the leadership of the CAM does not want specific information to reach their population, then the leadership would frame information as false, unreliable, or simply prevent the informationto reach their target population. For example, some Islamist groups use the grievance of the “weakening of Muslim *ummah[[6]](#footnote-6)*” as a frame for their CAM. They broadcast that due to the “Western” imperialism and globalization that Muslims have lost their way (Esposito, 2005). Moreover, the method of framing used to tap into what a population has been primed to think is the social norm. Europe in the 19th century was plagued with anti-Semitic attitudes; therefore, it was easy for the Nazi Party to build its political agenda in Germany by framing its political agenda via Europe’s anti-Semitic attitude (Conforti, 2010).

Cultural Agents

Leaders use cultural agents, such as collective memory or cultural artifacts, to frame cultural grievance to mobilize target populations. Art is one method that can be used to frame their message for a target population. For example, when Yassar Arafat addressed the United Nations in 1974, he said,“Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand” (Khalidi, 2006). Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet, wrote Arafat’s speech; Darwish was a man that was able to tap into the hearts and minds of the people and use emotional appeal to express peace and urgency to protect one’s country. These words have been repeated to illustrate peace, but also the willingness to take up arms to attain and maintain said peace.

Selbin (1979) defines collective memory as a tool to mobilize a target population by tapping into a significant moment in the past. These memories are of past independent movements, unjust acts, heroic endeavors, or national symbols that attract the masses’ attention and national pride, which are used to prime and frame revolutionary ideas to sell to the masses.

Bayart (2005) further discusses cultural agents as aspect of the political imaginary. He interprets nationalism as an imagined nature of individuals. It is a myth that has evolved into a metaphysical cosmopolitan unity factor that pulls people from different corners of the world. The pan-ideology thesis used by most leaders of CAMs is a bricolage of ideas[[7]](#footnote-7) to a revolution. Jamal Abdel Nasser used the pan-Arab ideology to gain popularity and legitimacy after the Nakba[[8]](#footnote-8) of 1948 that devastated the Arabs in the region. Therefore, the political imaginary play a significant role in the ignition of a CAM

Bayart (2005) further discusses how the political imaginary is one of the most significant types of iconographies transmitted to a population. Bayart (2005) defines iconographies as political symbols that trigger national grievances used to reach a sizable portion of the population. An uneducated population (that is to say that the population is uneducated in the complexity of politics) depends on specific cultural symbols to understand the message of a movement without the need of a detailed explanation of such symbols.

However, the influence of the "symbolic revolution" could be faulty. Leaders of such revolutions are vague in nature allowing the populace to rely on their own bounded rationality to fill in the missing information. Thus, each portion of the population involved in collective action will establish its own understanding of a particular symbol. For example, in 1989, Romanians declared their independence from the ruthless dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu. They used the flag as a political symbol to proclaim their independence. The rebels kept the Romanian colors of their flag, but ripped the Romanian Socialist Republic symbol from the center of the flag (Smith, 2002). For a while, the Romanian rebels were celebrating their independence from their occupiers by waving the flag with a hole. However, the empty space symbolized different concepts to the people. When they gained their independence, they then faced the challenge of filling the hole. This debate nearly lead to a civil war because the majority of the population did not agree upon a chosen symbol, the flag now only displays the three Romanian colors.

Repertoires of Contention

Bayart (2005) argue that iconographies are the repertoires of the CAM. Repertoires gain their strength from ritual political performances that the masses are primed to accept. With the progression of protests, these performances may change slightly from the original concept and may transform into symbolic actions (Tarrow, 2011). Strong repertoires establish mobilization from the force and identity of a particular collective action. These repertoires can include physical acts of protest such as hunger strikes, picket lines or non-cooperation movements. For example, when Britain occupied India, the Non-Cooperation Movement led by Gandhi was effective in using noncooperation forms of repertoires to halt the financial profits of the British Empire (Tarrow, 2011). Non-Cooperation worked and hindered the financial profits of the British Empire, and such tactics became the norm of the future.

It is imperative for a repertoire to be stable and strong. A weak repertoire, without a central foundation, will cause the CAM to deconstruct. A weak repertoire results in an ever-changing ideal of the protest. It will establish uncommon rituals that will detach itself from the population and the purpose of the CAM (Tarrow, 2011). Moreover, a successful collective action needs a strong repertoire to unify its populace or it faces deconstruction. In other words, no repertoire means that there will be no political and social relevancy.

The strength of a repertoire relies on the perceived threats and opportunities available to the CAM. Tarrow (2011) argued that threats and opportunities aid the trajectory of the collective action outlook. Threats are obstacles to the CAM that might hinder the progression of the collective action or lead to its failure. Opportunities are tools that can be used by the movement to assure survival and success of the objective of the collective action.   
 Diffusion of a collective action is a form of spreading repertoires of contention. This method allows leaders to gain ideas from other successful collective actions or avoid obstacles that may cause the CAM to fall apart. “Chevolution” is the popular tool of using images of Che Guevara as a cultural symbol of protest. This tool indexes the suppression and repression of a regime. It reached the street of Egypt in the 2011 during the Egyptian people’s revolution in Tahrir Square and the recent establishment of social movements in Jordan**.** ‘New Jordan ForAll’[[9]](#footnote-9) is a Facebook page, established in 2011, that calls for the change in the political structure of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. It uses a picture of Che Guevara alongside a quote for social change as a symbol for diminishing the corruption of the Jordanian monarchy. Diffusion of ideas can also provide the challenger of a collective action with external support and popularity.

Symbolic bricolage enables the diffusion of ideas of political contention. Tarrow (2011) explained that, “[b]ricolage pulls together accepted new frames to legitimate contention and mobilize accepted frames for new purpose" (Tarrow, P.146, 2011). Again, the “Chevization” of particular collective actions allows particular protests to relate with the history of the Cuban Revolution and the ideas set forth by Che Guevara. Collective memory can be viewed as a form of bricolage by the use of symbolic politics. Symbolic politics trigger the political meaning of a cultural symbol. For example, the Dome of the Rock is a used as a political symbol to Arabs, which represents occupation and war (Ateek, 1992). The question then becomes how non-state actors use cultural agents to mobilize populations.

Mobilizing Methods of Non-State Actors

Before reviewing the literature of mobilization, a clear definition of “state” and “non-state” actors is necessary towards a full understanding of the intent of this paper. A state actor is a subject of the state; such an individual has to uphold the laws and regulations of the state. Clapham (2009) defines non-state actor as an “entity that is not actually a state, often used to refer to armed groups, terrorists, civil society, religious groups, or cooperation; the concept is occasionally used to encompass inter-governmental organizations” (Clapham, P. 1, 2009). However, Clapham does discuss the various concepts of the term, how it varies due to the perception and environment of the beholder of the term. The term became associated with a negative connotation when the United Nations adopted Security Council Resolution 1540 in 2004 (UN.org). Due to the rise of terrorist activities in the international community, the Security Council obligated all their Member States to “[…] refrain from providing any form of support to non-state actors that attempt to develop […] or use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons […]” (SC/RES/1540). For the purposes of this paper, a non-state actor refers to an individual, organizations, movement, or a group of individuals that detach themselves from any government. Such bodies establish opposing (and sometimes hostile) poles of governance to control a target population.

McAdams and Tarrow (2011) proposed the Mechanisms and Processes of Contention model to explain the necessary steps to the formation and sustainability of a CAM. The first step of the model begins with the broad change process, the initial interaction between the Member[[10]](#footnote-10) and the Challenger[[11]](#footnote-11). The second phase of this model is the attribution of threats and opportunity. Attribution of threats refers to the obstacles that might prevent the Challenger (or Member) from establishing a CAM. Attribution of opportunities is the accessibility to resources that allow the CAM to progress (see Figure 1).

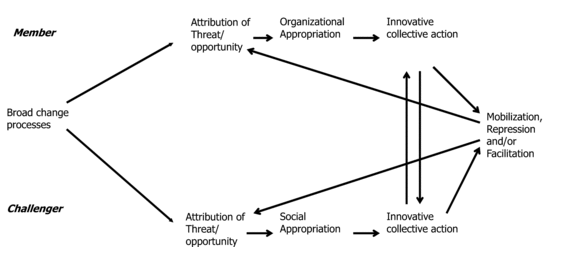


Figure 1. Mechanisms and Processes of Contention model. *Source*: Adapted from Doug McAdam, et al, *Dynamics of Contention* P.45. Copyright 2001 Cambridge University Press.

This leads the collective action into the appropriation phase of the movement. This phase allows both the Challenger and the Member to gain support for their side of the political contention spectrum. The organizational and social appropriation need to utilize in techniques that will grasp the attention of the population that is targeted. Innovative collective actions are the techniques that lead to establishing a successful or unsuccessful CAM. This phase allows both contenders to establish methods to lead a CAM, to gain supporters and sympathizers.

The model, which focuses on contention politics, addresses subsequent effects of repression towards a CAM by the Member. If the Member does abide to the demands against the regime, the CAM will be classified as a social movement and its aspiration or opportunity to become an opposition force against the Member will diminish. If the Member chooses to maintain power and repress the Challenger, these subsequent stages have a very high probability of occurring. The question then becomes, how can this model aid to interpret non-state actors’ mobilization techniques?

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1. Recognizing that in scholarship, these terms are differentiated, in the section “What are Collective Action Movements” and “The Origins of Collective Action Movements”, the terms are used interchangeably. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The both terms, charismatic leader and vanguard, are used interchangeably throughout this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cultural agents are specific trigger concepts of national, religious, or kinship identities of a particular community. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A=(B-C)/ Action = (Benefit–Cost): Rational Actor Model [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In psychology, heuristics refers to how individuals make decisions when given incomplete information (Simon, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In Islam, ummah means all Muslim across the world because they are considers to be brothers and sisters in Islam (Islamic-Dictionary.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bricolage of ideas, as defined by Bayart, is the act of using past methods of initiating a collective action movement and enhancing these methods to utilize in other collective action movements. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Nakba is Arabic for catastrophe. A term that is used to identify May 14, 1948 the establishment of the State of Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://www.facebook.com/#!/new.forall [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Member represents the particular state or leader that is protested against [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Challenger represents the collective action movement that is rebelling [↑](#footnote-ref-11)