

THE PERSISTING RELEVANCE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY AND POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT STUDIES

Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley
Georgetown University

Susan Eckstein
Boston University

Abstract: We examine the promise and accomplishments of New Social Movement (NSM) theory for understanding recent social movements in Latin America. After delineating and critiquing the key premises and concerns of NSM analyses, we demonstrate how a conceptual frame combining political economy and political sociology accounts better for the origins and trajectories of the social movements, including two of the most important in Latin America, Brazil's Movement of the Landless Rural Workers (MST) and Bolivia's Movement toward Socialism (MAS).

More than a quarter century ago several European theorists announced the coming of "New Social Movement" (NSM) theorizing. NSM theorists proclaimed that the long-standing and well-established study of social movements needed a new frame of analysis to make sense of a range of novel social movements that had appeared on the European activist stage in the postindustrial era, including feminist, ethnic rights, environmental, peace, and antinuclear movements, and (later) gay and lesbian movements. They stressed the novelty of the goals of these movements and their roots in grievances other than class-based ones, and argued that the new movements were based on the formation of new collective identities (see Touraine 1981, who worked also on Latin America, and Melucci 1985 for two exemplars). Scholars of Latin America's social movements soon picked up on these themes. In particular, Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez edited one influential book, *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy* (1992), and then six years later another, with coeditor Evelina Dagnino, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998). In both volumes the editors and many contributors argued that the concerns and social bases of contemporary movements in the region had fundamentally changed.

Herein we question what is new about contemporary social movements in Latin America and the extent to which NSM theory does a better job than our proffered alternatives in explaining multiple aspects of social movements and their trajectories. While not the first to critically consider the NSM approach, we

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do so in ways unaddressed by previous work. The fine book by Joe Foweraker, *Theorizing Social Movements* (1995), closely considered the more diverse 1992 volume and established a baseline critique of NSM theorizing for others who would follow. Yet it appeared in advance of the 1998 collection and could not truly address the “cultural turn” visible (almost without exception) in the latter book—the subject of much of our critique here. Maria da Glória Gohn’s *Teorias dos movimentos sociais* (6th ed., 2007) seems at first glance to provide a thoroughgoing coverage of NSM theorizing. Yet her textbook, however rich its treatment of US and European theorists (devoting a huge, complex chapter to NSM theory variants in Europe), still almost never deals in any detail with the Latin American variants of NSM, including Escobar, Alvarez, and like-minded thinkers. Furthermore, her syntheses do not foreground NSM approaches. Our approaches complement those of Foweraker, Gohn, and other scholars critical of NSM theorizing (see also Calhoun 1993; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Haber 1996; and in part Rubin 2004). We lay out the basics of the NSM paradigm, point to weaknesses therein, advance our own alternatives, and provide a range of empirical exemplars, ending with case studies of truly major social movements in Bolivia and Brazil.

PRESUPPOSITIONS OF NSM ANALYSES: A CRITICAL REVIEW

NSM theorists assert that the historicity, social bases, and origins of Latin American social movements have fundamentally changed, beginning no later than the 1980s. Most contributors to the two key works (the 1998 volume especially), as well as other analysts similarly inclined (Slater 1986, ch. 1; Motta 2009), typically adhere to the following propositions, which indeed have been quite forcefully advanced, especially by the editors of the 1992 volume:

1. Contemporary movements are quite novel in their aims, underlying dynamics, internal cultures and discourses, constituents, and their promise of democratizing society and the polity.¹
2. Previous social movement analyses were dominated by Marxian approaches with a near-exclusive focus on class and labor struggles and class-rooted material interests.² These approaches need to be replaced by analyses and correspondingly focused theories that privilege the role of culture and intragroup discourses.³
3. Recent movements, in contrast, are rooted in newly formed and newly activated collective identities, most notably concerning gender and ethnicity, as distinct from the class identities on which earlier movements rested.⁴

1. See Escobar and Alvarez 1992a, 1992b; Calderón, Piscitelli, and Reyna 1992; Escobar 1992; Alvarez and Escobar 1992; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998; and esp. Melucci 1998, treating both Latin America and Europe. Yet Hellman (1994) argues that many and sundry independent Mexican movement-organizations did not contribute to the country’s late-century democratization processes and were not internally democratic and participatory.

2. See Escobar and Alvarez 1992a; Alvarez and Escobar 1992; Calderón, Piscitelli, and Reyna 1992; Escobar 1992.

3. See esp. Escobar 1992; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, esp. pp. 2–3, 6; and Krischke 1998).

4. For a critique, see Haber 1996; on indigenous peoples, see Jackson and Warren 2005 and Casa-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008; for a work bridging NSM’s and our approaches, see Rubin 2004.

Anthropologists have especially embraced NSM analyses, since a deepened attention to culture, meanings, discourses, and contested identities dovetails well with the hyperinterpretative and postmodern turns common (but not universal) in their discipline.

But what is new about the NSM paradigm? Craig Calhoun (1993) posed that question for earlier NSM analyses of Europe, which deeply influenced those of Latin America, and concluded “not very much.” For Latin America, we reach the same conclusion.⁵ First, Sara Motta (2009) asserts that the movements she treats are “politically novel” in the fullest sense of the first proposition above.⁶ She avers that movements rooted among ordinary persons, the “popular classes,” often are seeking novel forms of societal and political existence, thus justifying her NSM-oriented approach, even a poststructuralist one. Yet are such movement traits really new? Social movements drawn from oppressed and disenfranchised popular groups (and not just classes) have historically often envisioned and sought to create profoundly different worlds than the grievance-inducing ones they currently endure. Every historical millenarian movement—the term itself denotes European social movements around the year 1000 CE—is virtually defined by such traits (e.g., Pessar 1991). Furthermore, the peasant warriors of the far-flung cases studied so closely by Eric Wolf (1969, Conclusion) all had their own visions of a utopian rural life. Such historical examples could be almost endlessly multiplied.

Second, the social bases of most contemporary Latin American movements are not as new as NSM theorists claim. This is true even of indigenous and women’s movements, among their most common foci. Women’s mobilizations for change in Latin America, such as women’s suffrage movements, even predated the era of import-substitution industrialization. Given that both such movement types involved disprivileged status groups (e.g., rooted in gender, racial, or ethnic differences), non-class-based movements are obviously not new to our times.

Third, while NSM analysts correctly argue for culture’s import to social movements, we note that even preeminent Marxists like E. J. Hobsbawm (1965) and E. P. Thompson highlighted cultural influences in their studies of older class-based labor movements, and for Hobsbawm some such studies included Latin America. (A fortiori, cultural foci have always been central to US-based movement studies.) Moreover, Latin American movement-centered scholars had argued decades earlier that perceived violations of cultivators’ normatively based “moral economies”—to apply Thompson’s (1971) conceptual coinage—also ignited revolutionary mobilizations for restorative justice; see the important works of Eric Wolf (1969) and John Womack (1968).

5. Note that in our following comments, multiple NSM theorists repeatedly reveal themselves as unaware of numerous historical exemplars of those phenomena they claim as “new,” just as their citation patterns and discussions show them ignoring the mountain of social movement theory and empirical research done in the United States for nearly a century.

6. She also questionably classifies as “new social movements” several clearly rooted in material grievances, like the Argentine *piqueteros* and the Brazilian Movement of the Landless Rural Workers (MST).

Fourth, NSM analysts often highlight people's multiple identities and how these influence their engagements with social movements. Yet we disagree vigorously with any suggestion that analysis of multiple identities is new to social science. The formal analysis of people's enmeshment in multiple group affiliations began no later than one full century ago with Georg Simmel's analysis of "the web of group affiliations." Rigorous analysis of our multiple identities was further developed by Robert Merton (1968, esp. 422–440) in his classic status- and role-set analyses; and multiple statuses were key sources of political cross pressures in Seymour Lipset's classic of political sociology (Lipset [1959] 1981, 211–226) and remain vibrant and fruitful sociological ideas still used today.

Fifth, NSM's notion that the forging of collective identities is new and basic only to recent social movements is factually inaccurate. Calhoun (1993, 395–396), for example, noted its import in nineteenth-century European workers' movements. For Latin America, historians and other scholars have long addressed how indigenous people's identities as "Indians" have shaped their collective actions. And our careful attention to collective identities and culture should not preclude examination of how they intersect with grievances rooted in class and status-group inequalities, and with local and broader political forces. In this vein, anthropologist June Nash's (2001) insightful and thoughtful works about Bolivian tin miners, *inter alia*, show how fundamentally class-based movements can interlace their activism with indigenous people's rituals and traditions. Culture is at the core of her analyses and narratives, but she never reduces the movements to a cultural base.

Non-NSM analyses contained in collections studying contemporary Latin American social movements repeatedly point to the importance of economic and political conditions, both in activating previously quiescent (in some cases) ethnic, culturally based identities, and in shaping associated movement developments (see Eckstein 2001; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003a, 2003b; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Kuecker 2008; Ballvé and Prashad 2008; and López Maya, Carrera, and Calveiro 2008). Further evidence of such correlative economic and political motivations abounds in our Bolivian analysis below, as well as in multiple studies of the largest uprising of indigenous peoples in Ecuadorean history, which exploded in June 1990 and shaped subsequent Ecuadorean activism (Whitten 1996, 197–98; Peeler 2003, 266).

Behind the symbolic identities on which NSM analysts focus there often are highly concrete, material-political demands. Indigenous movements thus routinely seek passage of new laws, constitutions and constitutional amendments, and collective rights to property and autonomy. Ironically, a lengthy, NSM-oriented review of recent work on indigenous movements confirms our argument about the centrality of material and political matters. The authors write that "territory—gaining land rights—continues to be the prime goal of indigenous organizations" (Jackson and Warren 2005, esp. 553, 564–566 [quote]; Hale [2006, 271] makes the identical argument). NSM claims notwithstanding, rare is the contemporary indigenous movement whose *raison d'être* rests solely or primarily on the "symbolic status" of identities (cf. Crabtree 2005, 85–86).

RESTORING POLITICAL ECONOMY AND POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY
TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

In the field of political economy, we argue that political and economic forces (from the global to the local) shape people's lives in structured ways. Those forces affect inequities and injustices in people's life experiences, perceptions of them, and responses to them, including whether, when, and how they pursue collective initiatives to effect change (see the contributions to Eckstein 2001; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003a, 2003b; and López Maya, Carrera, and Calveiro 2008; see also most of the contributions to Johnston and Almeida 2006; Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Kuecker 2008; and Ballvé and Prashad 2008).

Political economy also points to macrocontextual features, including global ones, which shape protests and collective movements for change. Since the mid-1980s in Latin America, those features have included the deepening of economic neoliberalism, democratic (re)openings, and the increasing diffusion of global cultural and organizational influences. These macro forces have shaped the experiences of peoples and groups and the likelihood that they will respond to grievances with collective action.

Political sociology further enriches the study of social movements. While political economy helps explain group experiences under different conditions, it leaves unaddressed the role of specific group memberships, agency, the role of leadership, and the like. More fundamentally, political sociologists have long addressed and accounted for the social bases of political behavior, especially across classes and status groups, as illustrated in Lipset's classic work *Political Man* ([1959] 1981), part of which focuses on Latin America. They also have long sought to establish the different types of social movements associated with varied class positions and class structures (e.g., Paige 1975; Lipset [1959] 1981, ch. 5). All political sociologists are also sensitive to movements originating within socially privileged groups (cf. our discussion of Bolivia below).

Later intellectual developments within political sociology are also of special relevance to our argument here. Resource Mobilization (RM) theory (esp. Zald and McCarthy 1987) notably asked the key "how" question: by what means do movement organizations manage to mobilize popular resources for their cause? Political Opportunity Structure (POS) theory (esp. Tarrow 1998), also further expanded our theory horizons. The POS perspective addresses features of polities per se, such as the import of party competition (e.g., for minority votes), democratization, more or less open spaces for civil society, the state's responsiveness to group concerns and/or its repressive capacities, and the public's access to "oppositional levers" via judiciaries and legislatures. All such features can shape the likelihood of social movement formation, the nature of movement demands, and the success or failure of social movements. Charles Tilly (1978) also introduced the concept of cultural repertoires of resistance, pointing to the wide array of specific tactics that movements might employ in their protests, from petition marches to road blockades, farm occupations, or guerrilla warfare. He also noted that, over time, both additions and subtractions are made to movement repertoires (e.g., the sit-in as a late addition).

Political sociology especially foregrounds the state. In contrast, some NSM analysts, such as Escobar (1992, 83), seem at best to refer to the state as an interlocutor vis-à-vis social movement demands and activism. Such a narrowed vision misapprehends the full import of state structures, for in all their power and materiality, state organizations occupy a unique position with respect to social movements (see also Foweraker 1995). By constitutional provisions, law making, and policies, states reinforce, expand, and dismantle systems of material and political privilege and their lack, in good part because they are themselves key dispensers of scarce resources. States are also central both to the creation and extension of rights and to challenges to and transformations of such rights (e.g., after revolutions), since they maintain and expand or withdraw and undermine material protections. States are also pivot points for systems of politically established discrimination and attempts to change them, for example via antidiscrimination laws, constitutional changes, affirmative action laws, and the installation of political, educational, or other quota systems. Accordingly, if we wish to understand demands of disprivileged groups, we should examine state biases in the distribution and allocation of rights and benefits before we focus on identity politics and quests for identity.

Yet people sometimes respond to grievance-producing conditions in manners short of open, collective resistance. James Scott has long been our best guide to such strategically limited tactics. In key works (1976, ch. 7; 1985), he insightfully argued that peoples with little power within established social, economic, and political structures may accomplish more through informal resistance, which may be covertly coordinated, than through either visibly coordinated social mobilizations or formal challenges to authority. Such modes of resistance include foot-dragging, passive noncompliance, deceit, pilfering, slander, sabotage, or arson, and refusal to vote or ballot destruction to delegitimize elections and electoral candidates. Although such quiet forms of defiance rarely result in major change, they can undermine government legitimacy and productivity to the point where political and economic elites feel the need to institute significant reforms.

In the rest of this essay, we do not consider all recent movements in the region but focus on those to which the NSM approach has demonstrated its blinders. We show how our political economy/political sociology frame of analysis accounts for many important social movements in Latin America—including two that certainly are new: Brazil's Movement of the Landless Rural Workers (MST) and Bolivia's Movement toward Socialism (MAS)—because NSM-style analyses leave them unexplained, and even undocumented, given their regnant assumptions.

VIEWING RECENT LATIN AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS THROUGH THE LENSES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY AND POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Work-Based Movements

Work-based movements continue to be part of the Latin American social movement repertoire. In countries where they have declined, the reason is not the dim-

inution of class identities and concerns, as NSM analysts would have us believe, but a rise in the risks of defiance. They are shaped by inequities and felt injustices rooted in conditions of employment. Marx observed long ago several social-structural reasons why the working class should be relatively easy to organize: laborers' physical concentration in urban industrial areas; their work-induced interdependence with peers; and common residential concentrations. Nonetheless, workers' movement options hinge also on the risks associated with defiance, partially a function of broader political and economic conditions.

Principles derived from both political economy and political sociology help to pinpoint why workers' proclivity to strike, the classic workers' recourse, diminished in Latin America even when work conditions deteriorated. In the region's import-substitution era, populist governments conceded a modicum of power to formal-sector workers. Tariffs limited foreign competition, creating conditions under which business could pass on strike-induced labor costs to consumers through higher prices. Strikes tapered off in the 1970s and early 1980s, not because workers' material conditions improved or because working-class identity withered away, but because of diminished political opportunities, as military takeovers of governments led to the consequent repression of labor rights in favor of rights of capital and capitalists.

However, strike activity never returned to levels of the premilitary era after democracy was subsequently restored—that is, when the political opportunity structure improved—for reasons political economy can explain. Workers came to face new economic risks as the new neoliberal governments removed trade and investment barriers, which perniciously eroded their ability to exercise their formally restored rights. The new governments, in essence, refused to protect workers from invisible global market forces. Businesses' rising tendency to (re-)locate anywhere in the world where they could increase their profit margins weakened labor's bargaining power in individual countries and therefore the effectiveness of strike tactics.⁷ The new democratically elected governments tacitly became accomplices in the de facto retraction of rights that workers had regained de jure, as they aided and abetted business over labor interests, owing to close ties between economic and political elites and to government concern with attracting new investment and tax revenue (Eckstein 2002).

Work-based movements persist most notably in the public sector, partly because public-sector salaries are notoriously low, as for teachers (Cook 1996). The public sector is also inherently subject to political influences, and governments must seem responsive to worker demands to maintain their legitimacy. Finally, in providing domestically consumed services the state sector is somewhat shielded from world economic pressures common to the private sector.

Aggrieved public-sector workers in multiple instances expanded their repertoires of resistance with recent democratization in the region, which has included democratization of media access. In late 1990s Mexico, public-sector nurses upset with medical supply shortages tied to neoliberal fiscal belt-tightening publicly

7. Only during the first years of the democratic transitions, and, paradoxically, against a backdrop of wage improvements, did strike activity pick up. On Brazil, see Noronha, Gebrim, and Elias 1998.

drew blood from their arms with syringes that they then squirted at the doors of hospital administrators to gain media coverage for their concerns. And in Mexico's state capital of Tabasco, publicly employed street sweepers collectively pressed for compensation for the private services politicians exacted of them and for reinstatement of jobs lost to neoliberal austerity policies. They staged a hunger strike, marched en masse to Mexico City, and stampeded into Congress, where they peeled off their clothes to press their claims.⁸ The newness of these tactics did not reflect a cultural turn as much as a shift in focus, especially when greater media access made such newsworthy stagings of protest and outrage more likely to bear fruit than in the past.

Even in some countries with left-leaning governments, state-sector workers have mobilized. This was true of the state-based oil worker labor aristocracy in Venezuela around the turn of the new century, which joined business firms in protests designed to bring the Hugo Chávez government to heel. Oil workers stopped production and took to the streets to destabilize the economy. Even though Chávez won that struggle, their protest demonstrates how class behavior is historically contingent, not mechanically predetermined by relations of production.

Also, not all economic protests have been based in work centers. In Argentina a broad-based coalition of workers, upon losing their jobs en masse as a result of draconian state-initiated neoliberal measures, formed a movement of the unemployed. In the context of the country's 2001 economic crisis, workers joined with other angry Argentines (in the so-called *Argentinazo*) to bring down the government (Benclowicz 2011). A social movement that began with demands for economic justice, namely the right to employment, tacked on broader demands for political justice and even the ouster of a government no longer perceived as legitimate.

In agriculture, any observed drop-off in protest also reflects broader structural dynamics. Disgruntled landless laborers increasingly vote with their feet, opting for individual/family "exit" over the path of collective protest or "voice" (Hirschman 1970). In the import-substitution era they flocked to the main cities, an option later closed down as urban jobs failed to grow apace with population. Today they instead often emigrate, moving to countries where earning options seem better. Even so, those remaining in the countryside are often at the forefront of movements opposing neoliberal reforms (Edelman 2001, 293), perhaps especially when they are guided and inspired by astute, charismatic leaders; able to count on solidary support from nonagriculturalists; and not sharply constrained by threats of job losses and repression. Although many others exist, such movements are best illustrated by Brazil's MST and by Ecuador during the late 1980s and early 1990s, where rural peoples collectively claimed lands and pressed for other rural improvements (Vanden 2007).

Agrarian elites, for their part, have themselves mobilized against those rare government measures perceived as defying their economic interests, such as tax increases in Argentina in 2008, 2009, and 2012.

8. *New York Times*, January 21, 1997, p. 10.

Consumers' Protest Movements

With the neoliberal era, protests became increasingly consumer based as governments cut back on food, petroleum, and service subsidies put in place during the import-substitution era. Given the aforementioned constraints on gaining better earnings via workplace strikes, low-to-middle-class city dwellers turned instead to protests where they lived and shopped (Walton 2001). Yet even these movements often have been backed by the organization and inspiration of labor unions, which strategically shifted their sites of resistance from those of production to consumption.

Consumer revolts were often framed as "IMF protests," because the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was a key force behind governments' retractions of subsidies (Walton 2001). The IMF pressured governments to reduce their fiscal expenditures (and thereby reduce their debts) and to allow markets to determine prices. Nonetheless, other forces also influenced the shape of consumer protests. Javier Auyero (2007) has shown that protests in Argentina have been focused not merely on external (read IMF) sources of grievances, nor solely on concerns with material living conditions, but also on nation-centered concerns with government corruption, popular dissatisfaction with elected representatives, and a quest for respect and dignity.

Consumer protests have varied nationally due to distinctive cultural traditions, class and organizational dynamics, macro-level political-economic conditions, state-society relations, and group alliances (Walton 2001). Cutbacks in subsidies, for example, stirred riots in Jamaica, Argentina, and Venezuela, street demonstrations in Chile, and strikes and roadblocks in Andean nations. Protests also varied in how violent they turned, largely depending on how public authorities responded. While consumer protests in the early 2000s led to dozens of deaths in Argentina, the 1989 consumer protests in Venezuela (dubbed the *caracazo*) generated an even more violent government response (Coronil and Skurski 1991), on such a scale as to delegitimize the government and pave the way for Hugo Chávez's electoral victory in 1998. Protests have led governments to retract, usually only partially and temporarily, those price hikes they attempted to implement. Even the threat of such protests has helped to keep a lid on government-sanctioned price hikes in many countries

While consumer protests involved defensive efforts to contain the cost of living, under import substitution city dwellers throughout the region had taken advantage of populist governments to press collectively for rights to affordable housing. Governments tacitly if not officially honored squatters' claims to the parcels of land they occupied and responded to their demands for electricity, water, and other urban services. Yet squatters' movements tapered off in the neoliberal era, as governments increasingly prioritized market solutions and were less committed to popular-class bases of support, and as the public lands where squatter movements had been tolerated had already been claimed. Nonetheless, such movements did not entirely disappear, for example in Peru and Ecuador (Dosh 2010).

Debtors' Movements and Antibank Protests

When their special access to institutions and governments do not suffice, even the more privileged classes in cities formed movements of their own. Middle-class movements grounded in economic concerns have in recent years focused on debt relief, especially when governments have devalued national currencies in response to institutional crises.

In Mexico in 1993, and several years later in Brazil, debtors' movements arose to press their respective governments to relieve their obligations to lenders (Eckstein 2002, 344–345). In Argentina in 2002 a movement emerged called the *ahorristas*, the “savers,” composed of people who protested to the government about the loss of their savings following state-initiated bank freezes and currency devaluations (Almeida 2003, 352). These debtors' and savers' movements called for state relief of debts and loan obligations (including further regulation of interest rates).

Mobilizations Rooted in Race and Ethnicity

At times ethnicity and race have served as independent bases of mobilization for change. While such movements often are firmly grounded in economic or class grievances, they should be considered as analytically distinct when they involve an ethnic or racial group across social class lines, or only a specific ethnic group within a specific class. Modernization theory presumed that as indigenous peoples assimilated culturally, and as peoples of different races intermarried, ethnic and racial identities would wither away. Yet as NSM theorists correctly note, recent history has proven otherwise. Since the 1990s new indigenous movements have arisen in Latin American nations with substantial indigenous populations, especially in Ecuador, Bolivia, and southern Mexico. Concomitantly, movements rooted in Afro-racial identity have come to the fore, most notably in Brazil and Colombia. The movements have pressed for ethnic and race-based rights, including the right to be collectively and selectively different.

Political sociological perspectives deepen our understanding even of these movements, for they point both to the fundamental (and long-standing) racial and ethnic inequalities and injustices that victims seek to redress, and to changes in political opportunity structures that induce (or at least encourage) extra-institutional collective initiatives for change. Especially with transitions to democracy, the political opportunities we enumerated above—in addition to improved access to media and the Internet and expanded NGO support—widened in much of the region. As the heretofore oppressed found levers of state power within their potential reach, novel contestations have emerged that have focused on greater rights, such as quota guarantees for political representation, bilingualism, curricular reforms within publicly funded education, and even indigenous peoples' rights to autonomy.

In Cuba, state authority and legitimacy weakened in the 1990s with the collapse of aid from the now-defunct Soviet bloc, and race-based discontent became more visible. The Castro-led government had for decades maintained that

the revolution ended racial inequality. Yet Afro-Cubans were hardest hit by the post-Soviet era crisis. As racial inequalities increased, they stopped accepting the official narrative. With outright rebellion still difficult, they developed more covert, cultural forms of resistance and criticism, especially but not only via hip-hop musical expression. Rappers through their lyrics demanded attention to race and racial identity and criticized enduring inequalities between those of African descent and lighter-skinned Cubans (Casamayor 2010).

As ever more race- and ethnic-based movements arose, and to avert more such, several regional governments initiated racial and ethnic reforms. Colombia granted Afro-Colombians quota rights to two legislative seats in its 1991 Constitution, and the Bolivian government introduced official educational bilingualism even before the country elected its first indigenous president. In Guatemala, indigenous intellectuals pressed for changes in school curricula to include the perspectives of indigenous peoples, and the Brazilian government under Fernando Henrique Cardoso widened Afro-descendant Brazilians' access to various public universities by instituting skin-color-based quota systems for the darker skinned.

Gender-Based Movements

Since women's concerns are often shaped by their social standing within their families and the society at large, gender and issues particular to women can serve as social bases of mobilization. The concerns of women's movement activists have shifted over the years, because of cumulative effects of earlier movements (e.g., successful campaigns for suffrage led by middle-class women) and due to inspiration from new international movements and ideas (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997; Morgan 1984). Despite localized variants, there has been an isomorphic tendency among Latin American women's movements to address similar issues, often mimicking one another.

As repressively violent regimes took power from the 1960s into the 1980s, women of diverse social classes courageously defended their rights as mothers (and grandmothers) when governments killed youth who resisted the breakdown of democracy. The women's movement in Argentina became especially renowned and inspired movements in other countries in the region. Ironically, in depoliticizing institutional politics the military governments politicized the personal and contributed to their own demise: women mobilized largely out of familial, not political, concerns and helped delegitimize the regimes and thereby contributed to the restoration of democratic rule.

Perhaps fueled by such women's activism, gender became so important that new democracies in the region often incorporated specific women's rights into their constitutions and established women's agencies. Paralleling and reinforcing women's advances in higher education and the labor force, new concern with gender justice led also to mandatory gender quotas for parties' electoral lists and in turn to the election of far more women in national legislatures and even as presidents (Krook 2009).

In the import substitution industrialization-cum-populist era, governments

had expanded their subsidies and partly protected lower-class consumption. Thereafter, as those supports were rolled back, the women in the popular sectors mobilized specifically for consumer concerns. They were strategically well placed to pursue consumer, familial, and localized concerns such as housing and services, since they remained in their homes during the day while their men worked elsewhere. Thus as rural-to-urban migration expanded, such relatively poor women mobilized in newly established squatter movements, proactively claimed vacant public lands, then defended those claims and pressed further for urban services like electricity and piped water. Poorer and lower-middle-class women later mobilized in reaction to state subsidy cutbacks in the era of neoliberal transitions—which raised the prices of basic foods, fuel, and services (e.g., bus fares)—to defend previously attained rights to affordable living. (The wealthy, by contrast, could absorb those costs and did not join the protests.) Women outnumbered men in these movements as well (Hellman 1994, 134), not because they were incensed by gender injustices but because they directly experienced the surge in living costs since they were responsible for household purchases.

TWO MAJOR LATIN AMERICAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF RECENT DECADES

The Brazilian Landless Rural Workers' Movement

Brazil's Landless Rural Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra, or MST) has become the largest, most long-lasting social movement in Latin America.⁹ Founded in the south of the country in 1984 just as military rule was ending, it expanded to include landless workers in the Northeast and the Amazon (Stédile and Fernandes 1999). Its focal concern is agrarian inequities and injustices, particularly for landless farmworkers and the unemployed. Building on a long tradition of rural resistance and rebellion, it was inspired by liberation theology and by Paulo Freire's critical approach to education (Vanden 2007, 26–27), and its tactical repertoire partly mimics 1960s urban-protest movements wherein Brazilians occupied vacant city lands, then pressed for legalization of their claims.

In Brazil, which already had one of the worst distributions of land in the world, inequality in landed wealth actually increased (Ondetti 2008, 60). A single corporation, for example, appropriated holdings in Amazonia as large as the entire nation of Switzerland or Belgium (Ross 2000, 488). Large landowners began in the 1970s to consolidate their landholdings and commercialized and mechanized their production, pushing sharecroppers, small farmers, and many former wage workers to the rural margins.

Against this backdrop, the MST attracted over one million landless members. It built its social base by appealing to rural laborers' desires for social welfare as well as land. It organized collective invasions of public lands and private hold-

9. For analyses of the MST and the data from which we draw and cite, see Hammond 2009; Hammond and Rossi 2013; Ondetti 2008; Wright and Wolford 2003; Navarro 2010; Langevin and Rosset 1997; Carter 2010.

ings that were unfarmed or fraudulently claimed. Since Brazilian law allows unfarmed lands to be expropriated and redistributed to those who will till them, the MST encouraged land occupiers to collectively press the government to expropriate the properties and assign them land rights. As of the early 2000s the MST also invaded and despoiled agribusinesses engaged in practices of which the movement leadership disapproved, such as genetically modified crop development and farming practices contributing to environmental degradation.

By the early 2000s the movement reportedly had overseen 230,000 land occupations, formed 1,200 agrarian reform settlements, had active organizations in twenty-three of Brazil's twenty-six states, and had helped over 146,000 families gain access to 5 million hectares of land (Vanden 2007). In the early 2000s, some 150,000 families were said to be gathered in the MST's occupied lands and roadside encampments (Ondetti 2008, 16). The MST fostered formation of new bases of solidarity and collective mobilizations to demand social entitlements not previously sought by any rural movement. Emphasizing community building within and solidarity among encampments, the MST set up schools, health clinics, and agricultural extension services. Settlements became vibrant communities that supported ongoing MST political education, politicization, and mobilization.

To advance its cause the MST relied on a repertoire of disruptive strategies that involved not only land invasions but also marches and road blockades, and even strong Internet outreach. Through its combined strategies it hoped to draw attention to the plight of the landless and press for reforms as a *quid pro quo* for any restoration of order. Beginning in the mid-1990s the MST further expanded its repertoire and began to ally with segments of the Workers' Party and to work also within the state itself, with members securing public-sector jobs through which they promoted MST interests and accessed government funds. Resource mobilization theorists long have argued that social movements' successes rest on an ability to gain control over resources and secure new allies; the MST notably did both.

The MST capitalized on an improved political opportunity structure: the country's democratization since the mid-1980s. Agriculturalists now faced governments and presidents more predisposed to respond to their demands with reform rather than repression, especially under Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010), known popularly as Lula. By contrast, the influential Peasant Leagues (Ligas Camponesas), which had flourished under tolerant elected governments a half century earlier, had been quashed by the military after it seized power in 1964.

Yet even under such a democratic opening, the MST experienced losses as well as gains, for landowners resented and resisted MST demands for redistributive justice that challenged their own interests and influence. Approximately one thousand activists and landless MST sympathizers allegedly have been assassinated or seriously injured. Military and police forces, responsible for most of the fatalities, sided with landowners at the local level and typically operated with impunity.

MST's successes in building a social base also varied among types of rural cultivators (Wolford 2010). Jeffery Paige's (1975) class-structural model for predicting cultivators' social movement involvement helps us understand why support

for a movement primarily concerned with gaining land ownership varied in its appeal. Consistent with his model and with much of Wendy Wolford's reportage, land invasions in Brazil appealed mainly to the truly land hungry, especially those recently dispossessed, not to those who either already had access to land, even if small in acreage, or were plantation wage laborers more concerned with improved wages and work conditions than with land access.

As compared to other social movements of the same era, the MST's long-term vibrancy rested on an astute leadership, one that resisted government and political party co-optation and organizational splintering, and on its success at securing benefits for constituents. Nonetheless, demands for land and land reform, the bread-and-butter issues on which support for the movement rested, waned after Lula introduced his Zero Hunger and Bolsa Família (Family Purse) antipoverty programs. The more the state itself directly addressed the material and social needs of the rural landless, the more the MST faced prospects of its own demise.

In sum, the MST is representative of a new social movement in terms of its goals, strategies, and even the collective identities which it created. However, an NSM frame privileging issues of culture and identity (e.g., Motta 2009) provides no analytic tools for understanding the most important aspects of the MST, especially its material foundations among land-hungry *camponeses*, from its very origins to its widespread impact.

The Bolivian Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS)

The Bolivian Movement toward Socialism (MAS), founded in 1997, no longer qualifies as a social movement per se, since it became a political party and then in 2005, 2009, and 2014 readily won both the presidency and congressional control.¹⁰ Yet it is based on a coalition of social movements that continue to maintain their separate identities, concerns, and mobilizing strategies; independently make demands on the state; and influence and constrain what the MAS in power can accomplish.

The MAS's very formation and strength as a party based on a social movement rested on the charismatic and astute leadership of its leader Evo Morales, a humble coca grower (*cocalero*) of indigenous origins who was elected Bolivia's president in 2005. He had led the movement of *cocaleros*—a loose federation of coca growers' unions formed to defend their material interests—when President Hugo Banzer (in his second term, 1997–2001) sought to eradicate export-oriented coca production under US pressure and with US assistance, as Washington tried to eliminate its drug problem “at the source” (in US parlance). In the Chapare, where one-quarter of the world's cocaine supply then originated, coca growers resisted the eradication campaign, blockading crucial roads and fighting security forces. They cut back their yields only when fear of losing US support induced Banzer to move massive military forces into the region and pay peasants thousands of dollars to destroy their bushes. Yet with coca generating up to four times as much income as

10. Much of the discussion in this entire section draws on Hylton and Thomson 2007; Domingo 2005; Barr 2005; and Crabtree 2005.

other crops, peasants often moved cultivation elsewhere in the country, where not policed, and then resumed Chapare production after Banzer left office.

With indigenous peoples at its core, the cocalero movement that the MAS built appears to be a new social movement and a prime candidate for NSM-style analysis. Yet the seemingly novel indigenous claims have at their base centuries of indigenous resistance both to assimilation pressures and to subjugation imposed by governments and the dominant classes. With Bolivian history punctuated by thousands of rural and indigenous rebellions (Huizer 1972, 3, 88–105), indigenous movements are hardly new to the country's social movement repertoire. Moreover, the success of the MAS has rested on moving beyond "narrow" indigenous concerns. Indeed, purely indigenous movements in Bolivia have been eclipsed in importance by the MAS. For example, the *Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti* (MIP), also a movement turned party, led by the Aymaran Felipe Quispe, has never attained an importance comparable to the MAS under Morales, despite MIP's extreme emphasis on indigenous Aymara identity and culture and its roots in the earlier *Katarista* movement (Crabtree 2005, 82–92).¹¹

MAS's successes derive from building on but also transcending indigenous grievances and identities. It reached out to mestizo lower-class, working-class, and lower-middle-class people who together compose the country's demographic majority. In its effort to broaden its social base, MAS expanded its focus even in the countryside, beyond the exclusive interests of coca growers, to embrace a concern with the unequal distribution of land and the rights of the rural landless to property.

In a similarly expansive vein, MAS built a broad national base by pressing for the population's rights to public ownership of the country's natural resources and the revenues they generate. People of indigenous backgrounds again played a central role, not in the name of indigenous rights or on the basis of indigenous identities but rather as opponents of neoliberal policies. By 2000 MAS was intricately involved with diverse groups that Bolivians called "the social movements." Together they protested the privatization of the water and natural gas companies (induced by neoliberal restructuring since the mid-1980s). In Bolivia's third-largest city, Cochabamba (located within the Chapare region), the social movements launched the so-called Water Wars when foreign-owned Bechtel Corporation purchased the public water enterprise and dramatically raised water charges. Protesters argued for water as a basic human right, framed their struggle in terms of the international antiglobalization movement, developed an Internet presence, and sent delegates to the World Social Forum (Vanden 2007).¹² Protesters so disrupted governance that the government again nationalized ownership

11. Quispe and his Aymara-based movement are also not solely about identity matters. Activist Roxana Liendo argues, "This is not because he rejects modernity. . . . Rather it's a coded appeal for social justice and greater respect." The Aymara of the Altiplano "want to share in the benefits of modernity, whether in the form of improved agricultural technologies or acquiring cell phones or access to the Internet," aims which are poignantly symbolized in the "communities' persistence in demanding that the government honour its previous promises to supply them with brand-new tractors" (Crabtree 2005, 85–86).

12. On Bolivia's resource issues see especially Spronk and Webber (2008), Crabtree (2005, chs. 1, 6), and Olivera with Lewis (2004).

of the water company and reduced the cost of water, seeking to restore public order and preserve its own legitimacy.¹³ Similarly, Bolivians took to the streets to prevent foreign appropriation of natural gas operations, a nonrenewable resource then providing the country's main source of foreign exchange.

Protests built upon a long history of miners' resistance. Their actions had forced the nationalization of the main tin mines in conjunction with the 1952 revolution, only to see them shut down three decades later by a neoliberal government dedicated to fiscal belt-tightening. World tin prices were not high enough then to offset Bolivia's high production costs. Thereafter, many displaced mine workers moved to the Chapare to grow coca, drawing on their tradition of militancy to fight the government crop-eradication program, and to cities, such as Cochabamba, where they joined the social movements. Shuttered tin mines meant no more mine workers, *sensu stricto*, yet their activities in the aftermath years demonstrate clearly, for reasons rooted in Bolivian history, why the displaced and disgruntled mine laborers further fueled protest movements where they resettled.

MAS and its associated social movements had earlier confronted two of the country's neoliberal-leaning governments and presidents, bringing them and their neoliberal policies to heel. The social movements forced one president (Banzer) to reverse policy during the Water Wars and then pressed another (Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada) to resign. Once in power, MAS quickly reversed some neoliberal reforms, partially renationalizing the hydrocarbon industry and then revising the constitution to allow new legal rights for indigenous peoples. It also redirected state revenues to address the social and economic conditions of poor children, the elderly (Crabtree 2005, ch. 4), and pregnant women, all irrespective of ethnicity (Postero 2010, 62).

Even in power, the MAS and its associated movements must be understood in the context of the broader Bolivian class and racial/ethnic structures in which they are embedded. The country's elite and the more privileged middle classes did not passively commit to the sidelines after MAS won the presidency. As we previously argued, the privileged also form social movements and also make use of extra-institutional collective strategies when their economic interests are threatened and when formal political channels do not work in their favor.

The anti-MAS resistance was shaped by the country's regionally distinctive political economies and social structures. The core of that resistance lay in the sparsely populated eastern lowlands, known as the *media luna* (half-moon). It is the country's wealthiest region, where large landholders and the natural gas export economy are concentrated, and its population is less indigenous and more indifferent to the indigenous plight. The regional axis of opposition, which sometimes turned violent, centered in Santa Cruz, the country's most prosperous city (Crabtree 2005, ch. 3).¹⁴ Yet such efforts failed in opposing Morales and the MAS,

13. Multiple treatments of Bolivian events in these years can be found in the collection gathered by Ballvé and Prasad (2006, 141–82) and in a single essay in the anthology by López Maya, Carrera, and Calveiro (2008, 173–96). See also Spronk and Webber (2008).

14. By 2000, the per capita income of the Department of Santa Cruz, center of the *media luna* opposition, exceeded that of the nation by 20 percent, was 30 percent higher than that in highland La Paz, and

whether extra-institutionally or through the ballot box. Bolivian voters strongly supported Morales's January 2009 referendum creating a new constitution, which gave a legal basis for the expansion of indigenous rights, reform of property rights, and other changes. His opponents also failed to stop Morales's 2009 and 2015 reelection landslides, or the sweeping MAS congressional victories that accompanied both wins. Only in the media luna did Morales fail to secure huge majorities.¹⁵

From the perspective of political sociology, what happened? The historically exploited indigenous peoples of highland Bolivia, who sought improved land distribution, greater community controls over land, local autonomy, and power over crucial social resources, finally saw their votes gain traction in the new century via a political alliance with the activist smallholder *cocaleros* of the Chapiro. A huge, newly empowered army of voters no longer diffused their political support among parties indifferent to their interests and no longer stayed at the political sidelines, too alienated to vote. To such numbers, the richer, more capitalist regions of the media luna, home to less than one-third of the country's population, had no electoral answer. Even in those departments, election returns showed large minorities backing the new constitutions, Morales, and the MAS (cf. Crabtree 2005, 53–62). To protect their far richer way of life from the recently empowered *indigenes*, the media luna-centered activists (like southern plantation owners in the mid-1800s in the United States) propagated discourses about their region's need for autonomy and even secession (Crabtree 2005, 51–53). They also initiated (unsuccessful) legal maneuvers to derail the new constitution, which they perceived as the foundation stone for a shift in the class and ethnic base of power to the country's demographic majority.

Meanwhile, the social movements mobilizing electorally through MAS never surrendered their separate identities, and thus formal politics never overrode movement concerns, because the state was too weak to craft effective responses to such challenges; even under Morales the government was not spared protests. When the fiscally strapped government announced in late 2010 a slashing of costly fuel subsidies, days of protests broke out in poor neighborhoods of the capital, and peasants, miners, and unions threatened to march to demand Morales's resignation. Faced with a conflict between state fiscal exigencies and pressure from his political base that threatened his own claims to rule, the president sacrificed the former in favor of the latter. He rescinded the subsidy cutbacks.

double that of Potosí, the core indigenous highland department; see Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD 2004, 18, 151).

15. The Tribunal Supremo Electoral of Bolivia released the 2009 results online, but that subsite and those data have since disappeared. But see its more recent website information at <http://www.oep.org.bo/Computo2014/>, for quite similar 2014 results (accessed April 15, 2015). We performed simple regression-style correlations across all nine Bolivian departments, comparing their MAS vote levels with indexes of departmental socioeconomic development. The 2009 MAS vote correlated negatively (–0.24) with per capita income (from 2000); the 2014 MAS vote vs. income correlation was even more sharply negative (–0.48). The 2009 vote also correlated –0.41 with department-specific scores on a year 2000 variant of the Human Development Index, with equally weighted elements for income per capita, literacy, and life expectancy. Calculations were made using development indicator data from PNUD (2004, 15, 16, 18, 20, 151).

CONCLUSIONS

Within the Latin American context, new social movement analysts claimed that the social movement universe and repertoire had changed, and they offered what they considered a conceptual frame best suited for understanding those changes. They privileged ideology, culture, and collective identity as conceptual tools while discarding as increasingly irrelevant the conceptual approaches derived from material and class-oriented analyses. Yet NSM-style theorizing remains flawed because it renders key aspects of important social movements undocumented and misunderstood. It also leaves thoroughly unexplained the macroeconomic changes that have diminished the historical importance of certain movements in Latin America, such as strikes, even while democratizing political structures have opened up new opportunities for other movements. NSM analysts do call attention to some novel movement phenomena, but they do not provide a conceptual frame adequate to address the full array of contemporary movements or their origins and trajectories. Moreover, much of what they analyze is not as new as they claim or is best explained from other perspectives.

For inspiring studies of social movements neglected by political scientists who focused mainly on more formal political institutions, structures, and processes, NSM analysts should be praised. Nonetheless, we have found their theoretical frame in itself wanting. Movements can best be analyzed by examining the interplay between people's collective structural locations—for example, class and status-group memberships—and the correlative material and political claims such groups typically tender. Therefore we have argued for the powers of political economy and political sociology to better account for contemporary social movements, including two of the region's most important exemplars.

Culture and those movements that foreground cultural issues are best understood in the political and economic contexts in which they are embedded. This is true even of movements based among those groups most favored by NSM analyses, indigenous peoples and women: for both groups, their very concrete, state-oriented demands simply fit badly with any narrow, culture-and-identity-focused NSM perspective. If such groups mobilize more extensively and/or in new ways, the change is explained far less by new cultural identities than by changing conditions and opportunities (globally as well as within Latin America) that have fostered the ability of disprivileged status groups to mobilize collectively and demand better treatment. For such analyses and understandings, political economy and political sociology need to take center stage.

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