

The Cultural Dimension of Social Movements: A Theoretical Reassessment and Literature Review*

Stephen Hart
SUNY-Buffalo

*This article examines theoretical issues about movement culture through an assessment of the recent cultural turn in social movement research. Various strands of work are discussed: Fantasia's Cultures of Solidarity; efforts to revise resource mobilization theory, including the collection *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* and work on framing; and Ginsburg's *Contested Lives*. This work is helpful in focusing cultural analysis on practical, interactive contexts and the process of culture-making, but tends to use regrettably diffuse and excessively social-psychological conceptions of culture. It also usually views culture too voluntaristically, pays insufficient attention to the role of pre-existing cultural codes and the connections between movement culture and other forms of public discourse, and neglects the role of religion in American political culture. The article ends with a suggested agenda for research on movement culture.*

Cultural sociology and social movement theory are now more engaged in dialogue than at any time since functionalist analyses of collective behavior were fashionable. On one side, "bringing culture back in" is a hot topic in social movement research. One example is the collection *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (Morris and Mueller 1992), which contains numerous essays addressing cultural issues and reflects a process of self-criticism and theoretical reformulation within resource mobilization (RM) theory. On the other side, the Culture Section of the ASA recently gave prizes to two books on social movements, Rick Fantasia's study of union struggles (1988) and Faye Ginsburg's work on pro-life and pro-choice activists (1989). Furthermore, among cultural sociologists studies of the arts and popular culture are now increasingly supplemented by work on politics, social movements, law, organizations, and science. In fact, cultural sociology seems on the way to becoming a set of theoretical strategies for studying cultural processes in any sphere, drawing on intellectual resources from the sociology of religion, semiotics, cultural studies, and structuralism as well as the hermeneutic tradition perhaps best expressed by Geertz.

* Direct correspondence to Stephen Hart, Department of Sociology, SUNY-Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14260-4140; e-mail: SAHart@ubvms.cc.buffalo.edu. This article is based on a paper given in a session jointly sponsored by the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Culture Section of the American Sociological Association, in Miami Beach, FL, August 1993. I wish to express my appreciation for comments and suggestions to Rhys Williams, Eric Rambo, Gail Radford, Joseph Tamney, Mary Ann Clawson, co-panelists and audience commentators at the session, and an insightful anonymous reviewer.

My purpose here is to assess recent work on culture in social movements. The body of the article consists of an analysis of important examples of this line of work. I will argue that it makes significant contributions not only to understanding movements but also to cultural sociology, suggesting a useful reconceptualization of the culture concept and offering implicit corrections to traditional approaches in the study of religion and other cultural forms. Nothing is perfect, however, and recent work on movement culture suffers from significant analytical deficits and one major substantive defect. The analytical problems are: a fuzzy and nonspecific definition of culture; an excessively social-psychological approach; an unrealistically voluntaristic understanding of cultural processes; and a tendency to think of movement culture as separate and different in kind from routine cultural processes. The substantive problem is this literature's notable neglect of religion when studying American movements.

Cultural sociology, and particularly the sociology of religion, have the potential to make important contributions to correcting these deficiencies. Analytically, sociological work on religion tends to have a less voluntaristic and social-psychological tone. Substantively, this work can obviously help correct the neglect of religious influences in studies of movement culture. The analytical and substantive issues are linked in two ways. First, the scant attention paid to religion in studies of movement culture is a consequence of theoretical problems as much as of the secularist myopia that probably also exists. Second, substantive examination of the nature, prevalence, and impact of American religious traditions would be a good influence theoretically, suggesting the need for the kinds of analysis missing in much work on culture and social movements. For instance, work on religion is not likely to be blind to the impact of pre-existing cultural codes and the cultural structures in which they are embedded. Analysis of these codes and structures, however, would be analytically required (although its empirical specifics would be different) even if religion were not such a major factor in America.

In this assessment, I will deal with two major topics. The first topic concerns the culture concept, which is variously understood. "Culture" can refer to particular spheres (such as the arts), but this understanding is seldom found in movement studies. Two other understandings, however, are common and cause problems. One is a social-psychological approach, in which culture is taken to be a set of values, beliefs, and motivations characterizing individuals. This approach (which Wuthnow [1987] has convincingly criticized) neglects the collective dimension of culture, found in received codes and their structure. The other is to think of culture as the whole way of life of a human community. This diffuse approach can be contrasted to an analytical one in which culture is seen as one dimension of action distinguished from other ones found concretely in the same context.

An analytical approach to culture has the major advantage of helping us address causal and historical issues about the reciprocal influence of culture and other dimensions of action. The classical agenda of the sociology of religion, for instance, includes concerns with how social-structural factors influence symbolic forms (e.g., through elective affinities), and on the other side how cultural templates affect practical activities. This agenda is equally important for understanding non-religious cultural traditions. Pursuing these intellectual objectives requires an analytical

separation of cultural and social-structural factors, so that their independent causal influences can be assessed.

What I have just described are ways in which understandings of culture within movement studies can be improved by using ideas from cultural sociology. However, studies of culture using an analytical definition are often focused too narrowly on codes and their structures. Recent studies of movement culture suggest the importance of the culture-making processes by which codes are crafted in particular practical contexts; attention to these can improve cultural theory.

The second major topic I address is the relationship between movement culture and other parts of cultural life, particularly in America. One great achievement of RM work was to “normalize” the organizational life of movements, seeing it as an extension of organizational structures and behavior found elsewhere in modern societies. A central task now is to similarly normalize movement culture, seeing it as an extension and crystallization of ordinary cultural life, as one component of public discourse. Movements push some of the possibilities of existing cultural forms in new directions, to be sure, but their cultural life is not fundamentally different in source or mode of operation.

Understanding movement culture as linked to other cultural forms can be a corrective to the voluntarism found in many of the writings analyzed below. By voluntarism, I mean a tendency to think of culture as an area where movement participants have more scope than in material realms to forge ahead independent of external constraints. The problem is that movement culture necessarily draws on external, pre-existing codes and traditions, and is constrained by their influence. These traditions are diverse and rich in possibilities, and this is certainly a source of agency, but they are also structured in very significant and limiting ways. One example of such structuring is described by Alexander and Smith (1993), who show that people on *both* sides of various American political disputes have felt constrained to frame their arguments in terms of what the authors term the “democratic code.” This code operates as a set of rules for discourse; to violate them puts one outside the bounds of effective participation in American political debate. In the movement culture literature there is insufficient attention to such institutionalized and constraining effects of culture.

In America, many of the pre-existing codes that provide resources used in movements of all political stripes are embedded in religious traditions. The importance of these traditions takes two forms. First, Christianity, Judaism, and increasingly other religions, are major sources of cultural content or templates: values and views of reality. These are appropriated, transformed, and then used by movements, to guide their activities and also to articulate movement purposes and garner support. These resources are drawn upon constantly by social movements, often doing things secular templates do not. For example, on issues of economic justice (Hart 1992), values of “community” are much more available to Americans from religious traditions than from the secular perspectives they have ready access to, given that probably only a minority are strongly influenced by the traditions of trade unionism or the somewhat communal “republican” tradition that Bellah et al. (1985) identify, and few are much influenced by Marxism. In addition to providing cultural content, religious traditions can influence cultural “process,” embodying cultural characteristics or strategies that are important resources for social movements and that while

not inherently religious tend in practice to be found most frequently in religious traditions. A key example would be the relativization of existing social reality through asserting a transcendent perspective, a process found in secular and religious movements alike.

The issues just raised come up repeatedly with regard to work on culture in social movements. Let us see how particular authors deal with them.

FANTASIA AND SOLIDARITY

Three moving case studies of labor struggles—wildcat strikes in a New Jersey foundry, a hospital organizing drive in Vermont, and resistance to a food processing corporation busting its long-established union in Iowa—form the core of *Cultures of solidarity* empirically. Fantasia opposes reductionistic theories in which actors are seen as irrational. But he wants to put culture and solidarity, not rational interests and especially not *individual* interests, center stage. Class consciousness and solidarity, in his view, do not result automatically from class interests and are not matters of individual psychology; rather, they represent relationships that emerge in action, and especially in workplace struggles.

What are the “cultures of solidarity” of which Fantasia speaks? They are emergent sets of oppositional or counter-hegemonic practices and meanings (1988: 17). By emergent, he means that they appear in new and somewhat uninstitutionalized ways, in the midst of collective action. Fantasia describes workers who develop cultures of solidarity—manifested in feelings, relationships, value statements, and actions—in the course of their struggles. In these descriptions, however, culture and solidarity are both somewhat diffuse concepts.

Like many social movement scholars, Fantasia appears to understand “culture” in the broad sense of the whole way of life of a human community—in this case, the community of workers engaged in struggle (p. 14). It is unclear what the specificity of “culture” is—couldn’t the book have been equally well entitled *Patterns* [rather than *Cultures*] of solidarity, for instance? Furthermore, the lack of conceptual separation between culture and social structure means that the book is unable to shed much light on what *effects* the symbolic life and discourse of worker groups have on their choices or the outcomes of their struggles.

Solidarity concerns not only interpersonal bonds but also the values workers articulate. Fantasia shows workers speaking of solidarity and community, asserting that people are interdependent and can rely on each other, that so-called private property is really a collective resource, and so on. He explicitly contrasts these ideas to the individualistic values dominant in the U.S. and encouraged by corporate managers. That is, the hegemonic values are individualistic, while the emergent, oppositional ones are communal. Formidable obstacles face cultures of solidarity, since they are counter-hegemonic, and yet Fantasia is fairly optimistic (e.g., p. 11) about the possibilities for their emergence. In fact, he manages to make a rather upbeat story out of three crushing defeats for labor. Fantasia argues that American workers are much more capable of solidarity—in the context of practical struggles in workplaces—than academics give them credit for, and ends the book with a moving statement that while worker solidarity might seem utopian in America, “it is rather more utopian to try to base a union movement on anything else” (p. 245).

The strength of Fantasia's analysis is that he assumes, correctly, that hearing speeches or other talk usually does not have much effect by itself; interaction and activity are a crucial part of the culture-making process. He focuses on ideas that are formed in collaboration with others and in the midst of enterprises aiming at practical goals. He challenges us to understand culture in a contextual way, rather than as ideas and values that are purely individual properties. He makes no assumption that ideas in themselves have consequences, an assumption frequently found in sociology of religion (e.g., the idea that traditionalist religious beliefs logically entail conservative politics and will therefore in some sense "cause" traditionalists to be conservative). The warning here is that symbolic codes are not self-sufficient and that the context—the particular culture-making practices—within which they are appropriated, articulated, and transformed is an essential part of what gives them meaning and power.

Thus, while Fantasia uses too nonspecific a definition of culture, his approach suggests the value of broadening the kind of analytical definition of culture that concentrates almost entirely on codes (discourse, symbols, etc.) and their structure, and sees "meaning" as generated by the internal relations among code elements. I think that we can have the best of both worlds, combining the advantages of an analytical definition with the context and practice-sensitivity for which Fantasia speaks so persuasively. We can do so by including as part of culture the culture-making practices and processes by which such codes are created, transformed, communicated, applied, and given meaning. Such practices are still analytically distinct from practices with non-symbolic outputs—for instance, organization-building or resource acquisition—but they involve context and agency.

What of the relation between movement culture and broader cultural forms? In this regard Fantasia's claims about the discursive aspect of solidarity—how communal values come to be articulated, for instance—do not seem plausible. Fantasia speaks of cultures of solidarity as emerging very quickly in the midst of action, but it is hard to believe that the kind of value statements just described are actually created *de novo* in the crucible of struggle. These statements are not unique or idiosyncratic; rather, they are similar from one of his cases to another, and resonate with longstanding cultural traditions. Surely they are largely crafted out of these traditions. Just as social movement organizations use existing organizational infrastructures and resources (while creating new ones), Fantasia's activists must be using (while transforming) existing cultural resources that are part of large-scale traditions firmly encoded long before the particular struggles began. These traditions provide not only particular symbolic elements, but also a set of structures patterning them. The elements can be patterned in alternate ways, but pre-existing structures influence the patterns a movement creates. The communal discourse Fantasia describes can emerge suddenly because it was already part of a repertoire of cultural possibilities.

The insufficient attention Fantasia gives to pre-existing cultural codes and structures is apparent in the fact that the cultural resources being used in the labor struggles he recounts never become very clear. One is left to speculate on possible sources for values of community and solidarity, since Fantasia for the most part simply quotes his activists articulating such values, without examining their sources. Glimpses of the sources, however, are available.

Unionism, for instance, is an important cultural tradition, even though it may sometimes seem anemic in America. In the Vermont case, an organizer from District 1199 articulated a noble and coherent vision of unionism, backing it up with his personal commitment and 1199's resources. In the other two cases, union traditions are more implicit but do seem present, and in the Iowa case may be linked to images of a "moral economy." Such images (classically described in Thompson's [1963] analysis of British working class culture) stem from long-standing traditions of working-class radicalism.

The traditions of unionism and working-class radicalism have historically often been secularist. However, they can be connected with religious themes, as when people draw on the tradition of Catholic social thought since Leo XIII that endorses unionism (some of the Iowa unionists expressed this connection by sitting underneath twin photographic portraits of JFK and John Paul II). Such connections were reinforced by a visiting fact-finding committee, headed by a priest from Indiana, that issued a basically pro-union report.

Religious traditions can support values of solidarity in other ways. In Fantasia's Iowa case study, a local church and its radical pastor articulated bases for values of community and solidarity in support of the strike. (The church also made an organizational contribution, but that is not part of the analytically cultural side of the story.) Fantasia also mentions in passing (p. 114) that two of the four key activists in the New Jersey wildcat strikes were members of a three-person workplace Baptist study group, and at another point (p. 267 n. 10) that these Baptist activists seemed to have a combination of moralistic views about lifestyles and attachment to the rights of workers.¹ The way he describes the combination makes it appear that he finds it either accidental or surprising, but in fact it is neither: *both* views are ethical stances that put transcendent concerns above the pursuit of self-interest, and both imply that we have reasons to cooperate beyond the overlap of our interests. My own research (1992) shows that this kind of combination of views is both frequent and intelligible, and that there is no connection between being economically conservative and religiously traditionalistic; in fact, in the U.S. religious values regularly support ideals of human solidarity and temper individualism (although they also support some versions of individualism).

In Fantasia's book, in short, neither religious nor secular cultural forms conducive to solidarity are examined systematically. Perhaps this is because he is so committed to asserting that solidarity emerges quickly and as a result of action, and sees solidarity as oppositional, whereas most of the available cultural traditions, such as Christianity and the republican language described by Bellah et al. (1985), would probably seem to him predominantly hegemonic. The truth is that mainstream culture in the U.S.—both religious and secular—contains individualistic *and* communal themes, as well as democratic ideas that can easily serve oppositional movements. In general, Fantasia's neglect of pre-existing traditions separates the cultural forms found in movements from those used in everyday life to a degree that is unrealistic, even in dramatic moments. His analysis would benefit from more focus on the "normal" quality of movement culture and its continuity with other forms of American cultural life. This would also avoid the excessively voluntaristic view of

¹ Fantasia himself was one of the two activists who were not Baptists.

the origins of social movement culture implicit in Fantasia's narrative. On the material, practical side, the workers he describes do not have much freedom of action, and their struggles are ultimately crushed. In the cultural arena, however, the activists seem quite unconstrained. A little more structuralism and less voluntarism, informed by a more thorough analysis of cultural structures and their implications, might make the account more convincing. The reality is that just as with economic and political history, we do not make our cultural history as we please.

NEW APPROACHES FROM THE RESOURCE MOBILIZATION TRADITION

Resource mobilization theory could be seen as an attempt to open up black boxes unexamined in previous social movement research. Earlier research had put such emphasis on external factors, irrational responses by actors, and in some cases shared values—as when Smelser (1959: 171-72) described labor conflicts as “hostile outbursts” in response to “structural strain”—that the practical, rational processes of building social movements and seeking social change, while in principle acknowledged to be important, did not receive enough attention. These black boxes were opened up in the early stages of RM work, which put great emphasis on practical, strategic action, focusing on the discriminating processes resulting in people taking action or not, getting organized or not, and having an effect or not. More recently, people sympathetic to RM theory, reacting to what they variously term the instrumentalism, utilitarianism, or rationalism of this paradigm, have tried to open up some more boxes: bonds and solidarity, non-rational motivational forces, and what is loosely called culture.

Frontiers in social movement theory (Morris and Mueller 1992) manifests this trend. As Morris (1992) puts it, “one central message of this volume is that culture must be brought back into social movement analyses” (1992: 351). The strength of this collection is its repeated focus on how meanings are constructed and transformed in the course of action and interaction. Some of the essays examine culture-making as an active social process, and almost all provide useful correctives to thinking of cultural codes as powerful objects acting on their own, independent of context or social practices. For instance Morris (1992) argues that class consciousness is socially and culturally constructed rather than automatic, developing through struggles and experience.

However, while the essays mention culture frequently they are actually stronger on social psychology. They generally seek to supplement the RM tradition—in which rational choice theory has been highly influential and the focus has been on organizations—with an understanding of *non-rational* factors and *individual* motivation. Since cultural codes are largely collective and include those used in rational discourse, this approach limits the contributions the essays can make. For instance, Morris and Mueller (1992: ix) speak of developing “a social psychology” and say that this addresses the “symbolic” as opposed to the structural side of movements. In other words, the symbolic (presumably cultural) dimension of movements is taken to be social-psychological and non-structural. Or take the essay by Klandermans: he defines the critical unsolved problem to be addressed by looking at issues of meaning as “what makes people define their situation in such a way that participation in a

social movement seems appropriate” (1992: 77). The significance of culture, then, is as a tool for motivating participants to commitment and action. This topic is well worth examining, but it leaves out the source and nature of the cultural codes and structures movements use, how these codes are re-crafted, and the consequences of this process for wider public discourse.

Another problem is that many of the authors unnecessarily wed a bottom-up, grass-roots approach to a focus on the autonomy of oppositional cultural forms, stressing voluntarism and agency. It is assumed that rank-and-file actors are not passive recipients of messages from the media, hegemonic institutions, or even movement leaders. This is a fair assumption, and can lead to rich ethnographic work, but it can also lead to the kind of excessive voluntarism seen in Fantasia’s work. Several of the essays focus on how people (especially those of subordinate position) manage to create partly autonomous, partly oppositional cultural forms. Such analyses stress the ways in which movement participants manifest personal autonomy, using cultural forms that they create to help preserve autonomy and seek social justice.

But culture is at least as often a source of constraint as of agency. It can be oppressive rather than liberating, and not just when it supports stratification. Thus, it is not helpful to think of cultural forms as being less structural than organizations, although the structuring processes may be different. Furthermore, agency and innovation do not come from lack of structure; rather, they happen when people make skilled use of possibilities in *existing structures*—cultural and social—taking advantage of their multiplicity, tensions, multi-vocality, and so on (see Sewell 1992). Related to this excess of voluntarism is a relatively weak focus on more enduring cultural resources that are often more widely shared and not directly tied to social movement goals. For example, Tarrow (1992) argues that “*mentalités*” and political culture are not very significant for social movements, and Klandermans (1992) says the same of “collective beliefs.”²

Frontiers is not the only attempt to correct the neglect of culture in the RM tradition. Another line of work, by Snow, Benford, and various collaborators, has developed the concept of “frames” as a way of linking social-psychological and structural/organizational factors, and as a tool for remedying various gaps in RM work, above all insufficient attention to “grievance interpretation and other ideational elements” (Snow et al. 1986: 464-65; see also Snow and Benford 1988, 1992; Benford and Hunt 1992; Benford 1993a, 1993b.) A “frame” is “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’” (Snow and Benford 1992: 137); “collective action frames” do this in ways that perform a variety of functions for social movements. Although Snow and Benford created their terminology out of ideas from Goffman, the phenomena they depict can easily be described (framed?) within a more culturally focused terminology. Collective action frames, in such a terminology, are cultural structures generated by movements; these

² Tarrow does show sensitivity to the power of cultural structures elsewhere in his essay. He argues that pre-existing structures, while not valuable in themselves to movements, are transformed by “social movement entrepreneurs” into movement resources, and that the pre-existing characteristics of the cultural codes thus transformed can place limits on the movement.

explain why existing conditions are unjust, show that they are not immutable, indicate strategies for making change, and argue to potential participants that action can make a difference. What Snow and Benford are describing is a set of culture-making strategies that movements use to build code structures that will be convincing to participants, supporters, and the public. They describe this cultural work as “frame alignment,” and identify various forms that it can take.

This line of work has significantly enriched RM understandings of culture-making processes and deals with analytically cultural elements of social movements. However, the language of analysis primarily refers to *individual* beliefs rather than collective cultural structures. How participants accept beliefs is central, the micro-mobilization processes linked to gaining such acceptance are a key concern, and the obstacles to effective framing are primarily described in terms of factors that can obstruct frame acceptance by individuals. The analysis is actually more culturalist than the terminology, although it is mixed and ambiguous. For instance, in speaking of factors conducive to resonance, Snow and Benford (1988) mention how frames fit with already-held ideologies as one factor, but talk mostly about how well the life situations of participants mesh with the proffered frames.

The absence of systematic and explicit attention to analytically cultural concepts may help make Snow and Benford’s message more palatable to RM people (perhaps even the rational choice advocates among them) and also make it appealing to people with symbolic interactionist theoretical sympathies (one could see this as a process of “frame extension”). But the absence exacts a cost. This is most obvious in issues left unexamined. For instance, if framing is seen as a process of culture-making—an active human craft—the nature of the craft and the quality of the product deserve explicit attention. How, beyond selecting for frame characteristics that will be appealing to potential participants, do frames get made? What impact do the craft products have, not just on participants’ commitment to the movement, but more significantly on their capacity to act effectively, the goals they seek, and how they pursue them? What contribution do the newly crafted cultural forms make to public discourse beyond the movement?

Snow and Benford occasionally mention but seldom systematically examine the ways in which pre-existing cultural traditions are appropriated and transformed, and how the results of this process are influenced by the structures found in these traditions, as well as by the commitments participants and leaders have to values and beliefs embedded in these structures. My fieldwork suggests that culture-making within social movements is often carried out by people with strong commitments to pre-existing traditions. People with such commitments do not just use these traditions opportunistically for movement objectives, and in fact usually care more about values found outside the movement than they do about the fate of the movement. Church members who become involved in the peace movement, for instance, typically have a stronger and more enduring commitment to their churches and faith than to the peace groups they join. This makes the issue of pre-existing traditions particularly important.

Substantively, Snow and Benford give little attention to religion except when analyzing new religious movements such as Hare Krishna. For instance, in an article empirically focused on the peace movement (Benford 1993a), religious issues are never mentioned, in spite of the importance of religious constituencies in this

movement, and the fact that two of the groups examined, including the most successful “radical” one, had explicit religious bases. This neglect of religion is a manifestation of the larger problem of not giving adequate attention to pre-existing cultural traditions and the influence of the structures found within them. As with Fantasia, the process of culture-making comes off as less constrained, and also perhaps more opportunistic, than it really is. Also, social movements appear to be more separate than they really are from other parts of the life of civil society in America—the network of churches, occupational groups, voluntary associations, and informal groups in which values and social analyses are learned, communicated, and transformed.

GINSBURG ON ABORTION DISCOURSE

Contested lives (1989), a study of grass-roots abortion politics in Fargo, ND, describes contesting organizations and their history of conflict—primarily around an abortion clinic—and then presents life-story narratives told by pro-choice and pro-life activists. Both kinds of material are rich and complex and provide Ginsburg with moving stories, as when the clinic and the group holding prayer vigils against it cooperate in helping a woman who would prefer to continue her pregnancy but cannot afford to.

Cultural elements come up in both kinds of material in the book. When Ginsburg talks about the conflicts in Fargo, she is at her best in describing the efforts of each side to legitimize its position and win the hearts and minds of other Fargo residents. There are especially subtle analyses of how pro-life activists share and appropriate elements of feminism and other currents such as the symbolism used in the peace movement.

The analysis of life-story narratives is fully cultural; for instance, a “problem pregnancy,” or ambivalence about becoming a mother, may be interpreted very differently in a pro-choice versus a pro-life narrative, and it is the interpretation rather than the event itself that concerns Ginsburg. Thus her focus is on the analytically cultural rather than analytically psychological aspect of these narratives. She provides a particularly fine analysis of the way in which many pro-life women subsume and subordinate pro-choice concerns through a narrative rather than deductive strategy, describing an earlier phase in their lives when they were pro-choice and how they came to a stance that includes the concerns that they had earlier while placing them in what they now see as a better context. Ginsburg’s ways of analyzing symbolism and meaning are highly sophisticated, taking multiple levels of meaning into account.

The book is also strong in showing both the culture-making process at work and also the cultural structures within which it takes place. For instance, in the narratives we see activists on both side appropriating, recombining, and transforming themes encountered in their families, churches, and the mass media, and derived from various traditions of religious, political, and ethical thought. In describing these culture-making activities, Ginsburg is not primarily concerned with people’s motivations and psychology but with how they participate in public discourse. These processes are analyzed, like the life-story narratives, as cultural rather than psychological phenomena.

Methodologically and theoretically, there is nothing a cultural sociologist could complain about or add much to. Substantively, however, it is striking how little attention is devoted to religion or even ethics in the book, given how much religious constituencies and values (and also secular ethical perspectives) are involved in the abortion struggle. The direct impact of specifically Christian imagery and values on responses to the abortion issue is not very visible. Many churches have made abortion a priority issue. Yet Ginsburg does not deal with the cultural impact of churches. She does not tell us what impact church teachings on abortion, and the ways of thinking that underlie them, have on grass-roots church members in Fargo. (Religion does enter in another way: as an organizational substructure for the pro-life movement, parallel to McCarthy's treatment [1987].)

Instead, the central issues with which both pro-choice and pro-life activists are dealing, as Ginsburg tells the story, have to do with defining femininity, defending women's rights, articulating the meaning of motherhood, determining the limits of individualism, defining and negotiating the private/public boundary, and describing and dealing with male oppression. In comparative perspective, however, making these issues central and excluding religious and ethical ones is not entirely plausible. These issues, and the demographic and economic changes that often accompany them, are common to any Western country. Yet the United States has an exceptionally high level of conflict on abortion issues. It seems likely that this has something to do with religion, which is exceptionally influential in the U.S.

It may seem more reasonable that Ginsburg does not deal with religion in relation to pro-choice discourse, since many pro-choice activists are unchurched. However, a good number, especially in Fargo, *are* church members—sometimes even Catholics—and most were brought up in churches. As I have argued (1992, especially chap. 2), Christian faith has many resources for asserting the importance of individual choice and the free exercise of conscience, and also for giving priority to intention and meeting human needs flexibly rather than enforcing received rules. The director of the abortion clinic in Fargo is the daughter of a Baptist minister, and she describes how her father taught her to value independent thinking and free choice based on conscience—core values for important strands of Protestantism, including the Baptist tradition. Religion supports pro-choicers as well as pro-lifers.

CONCLUSION

Social movements are excellent laboratories for observing cultural processes, and recent research on movements brings important contributions to understanding not just movements but also American public discourse more generally. But this research has certain limitations. How could we move toward overcoming them?

Putting together observations made earlier in this article, we can identify five topics that are central to understanding the cultural aspect of social movements: (1) what cultural elements—concepts, images, templates—in the cultural environment, embedded in what pre-existing traditions, are drawn upon by social movements; (2) how the structures of these pre-existing codes—for instance, the rhetorical strategies or types of narratives they make it easier or harder to formulate—condition their impact on and use by social movements; (3) what cultural craft-work is done by movement participants as pre-existing codes are selectively appropriated,

interpreted, transformed, and applied; (4) how the cultural forms created within movements work for the movements—what kind of orientation, guidance, rituals, and legitimation they provide; and (5) how these cultural forms ultimately affect public discourse and political events.

This agenda reflects a view of culture as collective and public, directing our attention more to how discourse is crafted and what political impact it has than to social-psychological issues. It adopts the broadened analytical conception of culture—in which culture is not identical with a whole way of life, but includes the active creation of cultural products in addition to code structures—advocated above. Also, by stressing the links between other forms of culture and that found in movements, this approach helps normalize movement culture. For example, movement rituals are seen as “normal” phenomena, drawing on the same templates as religious liturgies and the organizational rituals described by “new institutionalists” (e.g., Meyer and Rowan 1991).

If we adopt the way of conceptualizing culture that I am advocating, we will examine not only the functions codes perform for movements but also the ways in which they are created and transformed—what Geertz calls “the autonomous process of symbolic formulation” that is often “passed over in virtual silence” (1973: 207). We will focus on questions most social movement research has left insufficiently examined, such as how and with what consequences social movement frames are crafted. Instead of explaining movement culture either as cynically manipulative or as distorted due to social or psychological pathologies, we will understand it as emerging from the same processes as other cultural forms. By taking these positions we will enter into a distinctively cultural analysis and simultaneously normalize movements. Despite the great influence of Geertz’s polemic (targeting functionalists and Marxists), and repeated nods to it in the 20-plus years since it was published, the task of analyzing culture-making has largely resisted research efforts in the field of social movements, including much of the work reviewed here, and still deserves a great deal of attention.

This is not an idealist agenda. The practical concerns of a movement, and the human problems it is trying to solve, have a major impact in motivating people to become engaged not only in a movement but also specifically in the work of culture-making. These concerns and problems influence choices among the various possibilities offered by cultural traditions, although these choices are not usually made opportunistically. The political impact of a movement, also, is not determined by its discourse forms and strategies except in combination with a host of other factors. Given the barriers to success, movements need strong motivational bases, strong organizational forms, *and* great skill in the craft of culture-making. These do not substitute for but complement each other.

If we take the approach advocated here, our understanding of social movements will have a balanced focus on both cultural codes and culture-making processes, and on both structure and agency. Let me comment, in closing, on the normative aspect of the issue of voluntarism, which is related to this balance. The intentions behind the analyses I have criticized as excessively voluntaristic are in my view admirable. RM writers are generally people with personal concerns for democracy, peace, and social justice; they wish many movements well. However, one may not be doing movements any great favor by overemphasizing the autonomy of popular action and

culture. One could argue that it would be more helpful to admit the actual constraints, cultural and social-structural, that actors face and do something practical about them, rather than to put so much energy into arguing that actors already have great autonomy. The answers to the urgings social movement researchers find in their hearts may be found not so much in sociological reformulations as in political ones.

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