

Comparative Perspectives on Contentious Politics

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In the mid-1990s, the study of non-routine, or contentious, politics had become a thriving, but fragmented interdisciplinary field of study, with expertise divided across a confusing patchwork of disciplinary boundaries, geographic areas, historical eras, and nominally different types of contention (e.g. revolutions, peasant rebellions, strikes, social movements, civil wars, etc.). Most of the work in the field focused on (usually reformist) social movements in the countries of the North, with distinct bodies of research on revolutions, civil wars, and terrorism and on the contentious politics of post-authoritarian transitions. In this sense, the field of contentious politics was less a consensual, than an imagined, terrain of study.

The field is still fragmented, disconnected, and contentious, but we see some windows of clarity in what was an obscure wall of teaching, research and controversy a decade ago.

- *First*, many in the field have taken a “culturalist turn” in a deliberate departure from the dominant structuralist tradition in the social movement field, while still others have been inspired by the rational choice tradition;
- *Second*, changes in the “real world” have turned many scholars attention beyond the reforminst social movements that were the stock-in-trade of the field to the study of terrorism, civil wars, and insurgencies;
- *Third*, in part in response to these real world changes and in part in reaction to the fragmentation of the field, a broad perspective focusing on contentious politics has come to occupy a distinct space in the field.

In this largely re-written chapter, our principal goal is to encourage a crossing of the various boundaries—disciplinary, historical, geographic, and between different forms of contention—that divide the field of contentious politics. A second goal is to persuade our readers that different forms of contention – like social movements and civil wars -- dovetail with different types of regime. And a third is to argue that a fruitful way of comparing these forms is to construct analytic narratives of episodes of contention and to break them down into the mechanisms and processes that drive them and connect them to their origins and outcomes.

We take up six topics in this chapter. In Part One, we lay out our general perspective on contentious politics, one that – we hasten to add – has not become consensual in the field (*Mobilization* 2003). In Part Two, we offer an updated sketch of how the field has evolved from the 1960s through the 1990s. In Part Three we lay out some of the mechanisms and processes that we have found central to the dynamics of contention. In Part Four we focus on some of the distinctive features of two very different forms of contention – social movements and civil wars -- and their relationship to different types of regime. In Part Five, we illustrate some ways in which integrated approaches to contentious politics by a number of other scholars is

contributing to comparative politics. We close by offering our thoughts on what remains to be done to create an integrated field of contentious politics. We do not deal with substantive debates, except where these mark theoretical or methodological departures in the field.

I. Common Properties of Contentious Politics

Contentious politics consists of public, collective making of consequential claims by connected clusters of persons on other clusters of persons or on major political actors, when at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a third party to the claims. Thus defined, contentious politics is a causally coherent domain with distinctive properties. It is causally coherent in the sense that similar cause-effect relationships apply throughout the domain. It is distinctive in the sense that some features of contentious politics appear nowhere else in social life.

A. Interactions, Claims and Governments

Let us begin with common properties that are true by definition: interactions, collective claims, and governments. Contentious politics necessarily involves *interactions* among clusters of persons, the minimum set being one claimant, one object of claims, and a third party to the claims. Interaction matters because it builds on, establishes, and transforms relations among political actors. Models of political action that take up just one actor at a time cannot explain such interactions or their outcomes.

Contentious politics centers on consequential collective *claims*: calls for action on the part of some object that would, if realized, affect that object's interests. Claims range from decorous collective expressions of support to devastating attacks. The inclusion of claims in the definition rules out inadvertent, indirect, and incremental interactions, however politically consequential. It rules out, for example gradual encroachment of one peasant community on the land of an adjacent peasant community. If, on the other hand, one community makes public, collective demands for some portion of its neighbor's land, the two communities move definitively into the zone of contentious politics.

Governments figure in all of contentious politics, although frequently as third parties rather than initiators or objects of claims. The involvement of governments means that contentious politics necessarily interacts with non-contentious political processes such as routine public administration, organization of elections, military conscription, tax collection, appointment of officials, and disbursement of funds. Collective contention often occurs around each of these routine political processes. But contention in adjacent arenas regularly affects them as well, for example when street disorders disrupt the delivery of governmental services. The availability of

governmental coercion gives an edge to political contention that rarely exists outside of the political arena.

In political contention, most forms of contention are either conventional or confrontational – more rarely, violent. Conventional and confrontational forms of action are most typical of what we call “the social movement repertoire.” Large-scale violence always remains a possibility, however faint. Contention connected to governments does resemble contention in families, sports, churches, and businesses in some regards. But we single out government-connected contention because it has distinctive properties.

B. Proximate Effects

Each of the three main components of contentious politics – interactions, claims, and governments – has proximate effects that are not simply true by definition. Interaction between actors does not simply use or reproduce the relation between them. Incrementally or explosively, it transforms both actors and relations. That is true of third parties as well as of initiators and objects of claims. At a minimum, contentious interaction between A and B provides C with information about the individual propensities and capacities of A and B, about potential future interactions between them, and about likely effects of C’s future intervention in political situations involving A and B.

Collective claims likewise have political effects beyond the immediate outcomes of their calls for action. Compared with those outcomes, they provide information about the future feasibility of similar claims. They lay down a publicly accessible history of interactions among the parties: X makes claims on Y, but Z then smashes both of them. Successive claims between the same pair of actors and outcomes of those claims thus create cultural material that remains available for later interaction. We can call those materials collective memory so long as we heed the warnings that a) groups do not store traces of the past in the same ways that individual brains do and b) different individuals in a group call up distinct and even conflicting memories of past contention.

Governments alter their organizations, personnel, policies, and practices in response to their participation in contentious politics. But their organizations, personnel, policies, and practices also profoundly shape contentious politics. To take the obvious point, the means of coercion – armies, paramilitaries, police, jails, secret operatives, and so on – available to a given government significantly affect its capacity and propensity to intervene in contention involving non-governmental actors.

But regularized relations between governments and major political actors matter just as much. We can conveniently call those regularized relations *regimes*.

Until we take regimes into account – as we will do in Part Four -- we cannot tell whether a government has high or low capacity, operates democratically or undemocratically, depends heavily on patronage and corruption, or excludes major segments of the population from its system of rule. Forms of governments and regimes strongly limit the character of contentious politics. Students of comparative politics regularly pay attention to the proximate effects of interactions, claims, and governments on contention.

Beyond common properties of contentious politics that hold true by definition and the proximate effects of the definitional elements, we enter a zone of adventure and controversy. For the moment, students of the subject have not agreed on a set of empirical generalizations and explanations that cut across the many varieties of contention. To be sure, some relatively general *aspects* of contentious politics have long stimulated cumulative knowledge. Some scholars investigate common properties of repression across a wide variety of contention, others study effects of democratization on contention at large, while still others analyze the impact of different sorts of social cleavages on the character and intensity of a regime's contentious politics. Indeed, just such cross-cutting efforts give us some warrant for believing that a more thoroughgoing search for cause-effect relations spanning multiple forms of contention will be fruitful. We will turn to them in Part Five of this chapter.

Students of contentious politics have identified a number of properties that hold across a wide variety of contentious politics. Let us group some of the most important under three headings: 1) political opportunity structures, 2) collective actors, and 3) performances and repertoires.

Political Opportunity Structures are features of regimes that affect the likely outcomes of actors' possible claims. Those features include:

- a. the multiplicity of independent centers of power within the regime
- b. the regime's openness to new actors
- c. instability of current political alignments
- d. availability of influential allies or supporters for challengers
- e. the extent to which the regime represses or facilitates collective claim making
- f. decisive changes in items a to e

The higher the value of any item in a given regime, all other things equal, the greater the likelihood that actors' claims will be realized. This means, of course, that within the gross variation from low-opportunity to high-opportunity regimes political opportunity structure also varies from actor to actor and situation to situation. Not all potential actors, for example, enjoy the same access to allies and supporters.

Of course, structures of opportunity and threat are objective factors that may or may not be perceived by challengers. In our work on *Dynamics of Contention* (hereinafter *DOC*) we have emphasized the *attribution of opportunity* as the first step in the process of mobilization (McAdam, et al., 2001: ch. 2). The same is true of threat: the fact that citizens of the Soviet bloc perceived of their regimes as all-powerful constrained them from rebelling until a combination of domestic and international factors revealed the rot at the core of their systems. It was as a result of this collective perception of increased opportunity and reduced threat that cascades of contentious politics began to unfurl in the decaying state socialist bloc (Beissinger 2003).

The Formation of Collective Actors. In contrast to structural language that imputes durable propensities and capacities to groups and categories such as non-governmental organizations and ethnic clusters, since the work of Alberto Melucci (1988) students of contentious politics have observed that the constitution of claim-making actors turns out to be a contingent, dynamic process. Participants frequently shift their collective definitions of who “we” and “they” are. They do so especially through two processes. First, they create new connections among individuals, networks, and previously constituted actors in the form of named coalitions, fronts, and organizations. Second, they activate, deactivate, and redraw boundaries separating one actor from other, creating collective stories about the two sides (Tilly and Tarrow 2006: ch. 3). Collective identity formation, in other words, is *relational*.

Performances and Repertoires. Instead of varying infinitely as a function of interests, opportunities, and strategic calculations, within any particular regime collective claim making clusters in a remarkably small number of performances. In contemporary democracies, for example, many political actors know how to petition and to hold a public meeting, but not how to organize a coup d'état or assassinate a rival candidate. In many a troubled regime, however, the opposite is true: the claim making performances of petitioning and meeting publicly are simply unavailable, while coups or assassinations are standard ways of doing political business.

Performances, furthermore, clump into sets that students of contentious politics call repertoires. Repertoires belong to regimes, and more precisely to recurrent claimant-object pairs within regimes. Within the democratic and semi-democratic regimes that host social movements, for example, groups of citizens that make claims on authorities can choose among petitions, public meetings, press statements, demonstrations, lobbying, and a number of other performances that began clustering together in European and North American social movements during the early 19th century, and eventually spread across much of the democratic and semi-democratic world.

Existing repertoires channel contentious politics by producing widely recognizable and practicable forms of coordination and signaling. They also

accumulate information about political opportunity structure: the recent record of a particular performance tells potential claimants and objects of claims about the likely outcomes of different strategies, likely opponents and coalition patterns, and the sheer feasibility of coordinated action. For that very reason, governments and other major political actors regularly exert controls over various known performances, attempting to prescribe some, tolerate others, and forbid still others.

Three interacting clusters of causes produce change and variation in prevailing repertoires. First, variations and alterations in everyday social organization – down to such details as the availability or unavailability of telephones and public transportation – affect the feasibility of different kinds of performances. Second, the variable and changing character of regimes impinges on political opportunity structure, on the nature of identity, standing, and program claims, and on the array of political actors actually or potentially available for contention. Third, within contention itself improvisation and learning occur: actors innovate, some innovations catch on, performances stop producing their desired effects, and shared understandings concerning the meanings of different forms of contention evolve. But once improvisation and learning occur in one site, they often spread to other sites through diffusion, emulation, and organized initiation, intersecting with these sites and producing distinctive outcomes. This takes us to the larger issue of the distinctive forms of contentious politics.

We have framed these generalizations in language that emerged from our own work – individual and collective – on contentious politics. However, we should also emphasize that they are part of a collective conversation among a large number of specialists in sociology and political science from the United States, Western Europe and, to a lesser extent, from countries in the South. In the next section, and at the risk of leaving out some important subtleties and disagreements, we trace how this consensus evolved, and how three strands of theory and research contributed to it:

- the “political process” approach that began in the study of American politics (Eisinger 1973) and diffused to Western Europe and elsewhere;
- the collective action perspective that arose out of microeconomics (Olson 1965), and triggered a “resource mobilization” response in the study of social movements;
- and the “framing” perspective that came to the study of contentious politics from social psychology, and especially from the contributions of Erving Goffman (1974).

Among them, these three perspectives contributed to a broad consensus on the kinds of variables that are considered important in predicting the emergence and

outcomes of social movements. Less consensus exists, however, on the dynamics of contention, which we will argue can only be understood with greater attention to specifying the mechanisms and processes that drive it.

II. The Evolution of the Field

Perhaps more than in any other sector of comparative politics, the study of contention is highly sensitive to developments in the real world. The starting point was the western social movement cycle of the 1960s, starting with civil rights and the New Left in the United States, broadening into the movements of 1968 in Europe, which, in turn, expanded into the “new” social movements of the 1970s and 1980s.

Three main scholarly approaches developed in response to these changes:

- a structurally-rooted *political process model*
- a *rational choice* perspective and its related *resource mobilization* variant
- and a *constructivist approach* which draws, first, on an older “collective behavior” approach and, second, on the more general cultural turn in the social sciences.

A rapid look at the evolution of these main schools of thought, and at one representative exponent of each will show how these approaches developed and how they differ. They will also help us to outline the foundations for the synthesis we hope to advance: *the integrated study of contentious politics by building analytic narratives of episodes of contention based on a mechanism-and-process approach.*

A. The Political Process Approach

Led by the precocious rise of contentious politics in their country in the early 1960s, American scholars were the first to develop a political-structural approach to movements, centering on several versions of the concept that has come to be known as “political opportunity structure.” American scholars like Eisinger (1973), the Tillys (1975), Piven and Cloward (1977), McAdam 1982 [1999], Tarrow (1989) , and, most recently, Amenta (2006) saw collective action as both a response to, and an influence on institutional politics. Western European scholars, starting from a different empirical base, developed a different kind of structuralism influenced by post-marxism. While the student movements of the late 1960s led some Europeans to infer a new class basis for social movements (Touraine 1971), others were re-framing structuralism around the study of objective life-chance coalitions (Habermas 1981; Offe 1985). This approach eventually congealed into what was called in the 1980s the new social movement approach. There was eventually a convergence: spurred on by an increasingly dense network of contacts across the Atlantic,

American scholars soon became more aware of the European approaches, while the Europeans -- despite their distaste for American inductivism -- eventually focused on political institutions (compare Offe 1985 with Offe 1990; also see Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1992; 1995).

This intersection between the European new social movement approach and the American political process approach diffused the closest thing that the field of contentious politics has to a core methodology -- protest event analysis (Rucht, Koopmans and Neidhardt, eds. 1999). Practitioners applied this methodology to episodes of contention as different as Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Tilly 1995), American ethnic conflicts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Olzak 1992), Germany from the late 1940s to the 1990s (Rucht and Ohlemacher 1992), the American civil rights movement (McAdam 1999 [1982]), Italy in the 1960s (Tarrow 1989), four other European democracies in the 1980s (Kriesi et al. 1992, 1995), and nationalist mobilization in the collapsing Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002).

Meanwhile, the study of revolutions was progressing along a parallel track with a heavy dose of the structuralism that was popular in the 1960s. In the deep historical investigations of a Moore (1966), the anthropological-historical case studies of a Wolf (1969), and the systematic agrarian comparisons of a Paige (1975), both western and non-western revolutions were examined in relation to their social-structural underpinnings. More politically-oriented structural analyses of third-world revolutions were being carried out at the same time by Joel Migdal (1974). Structuralism reached its culmination with respect to revolutions in the work of Theda Skocpol.

Skocpol on Revolutions. Part of the enduring popularity of Skocpol's work on revolutions is due to the fact that it combined macro-sociological and political structuralism (1979, 1994). In explaining the origins of three great social revolutions, Skocpol combined an emphasis on class relations (but *not* those of the urban proletariat) with an acute attention to states' fiscal crises, in interaction with their international vulnerability. When she turned to revolutionary outcomes, state structure loomed even larger in her vision, while international factors receded into the background (cf. Walt 1996). As for the revolutionary political process -- the dynamic of political culture, coalition building and leadership -- Skocpol's statism left little space for it, a lacuna that her critics were quick to notice.¹

In her later work on revolutions, Skocpol softened this elemental statism, added the relevance of urban classes and inter-class coalitions to the overworked peasantry, and admitted that professional revolutionaries and ideologies help to

¹ The corpus of criticism of Skocpol's book would fill a review article on its own. For her encyclopedic, and sometimes acerbic reply to some of her critics, see her *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, Conclusion.

make revolutions within broad structural parameters (1982; 1994). But her work remained largely free of cross-fertilization with the *political* structuralism that was developing in the social movement field; with the micro-historical emphasis on agency that was advancing the culturalist study of revolutions (Selbin 1993); with the deeper cultural approaches pioneered by Lynn Hunt (1984); with the rational choice approaches of Popkin (1977) and Taylor (1988); or with the ambitious syncretism of Goldstone (1991), Wickham-Crowley (1992), and Goodwin (1994; 2001).

B. Rational Choice and Resource Mobilization

In the mid-1960s, a new perspective entered the study of contentious politics from a surprising direction – economics -- and particularly the version of collective action theory developed by American economist Mancur Olson (1965). Olson's work led rationalist-oriented political scientists to focus on the micro-foundations of collective action, and to turn from specific forms of contention to develop a general covering law intended to cover *all* forms of collective action based loosely on the central theorem of marginal utility. Olson's work electrified both sociological and political science students of movements because it questioned what existing schools of thought had taken for granted: that people will always act on behalf of claims that they "should" be making. In sociology, the school of "collective behavior" and, in political science, "relative deprivation" both assumed that grievances would produce collective action.

Best synthesized in the theoretical work of Neil Smelser (1962), the collective behavior school emphasized the cognitive and emotional elements in collective action. Linked thematically to Durkheim's interest in "anomie," its more extreme manifestations invited caricature by regarding collective action mainly as the result of alienation and psychological disorder (Hoffer 1951; Kornhauser 1959). But even more balanced proponents of the approach never solved the puzzle that *there is no one-to-one relationship between the extent of people's grievances and their capacity and willingness to advance their claims* (McAdam 1982 [1999]). In political science, a cognate concept was "relative deprivation", which Gurr (1970) saw as the major factor that leads people to engage in contentious and violent behavior. Relative deprivation soon turned out to be a difficult construct to operationalize with the kind of aggregate data sources that Gurr employed, but his method – minus its social psychological goal -- was eventually applied to "conflict studies" of all kinds.

Olson's contributions might have gone unnoticed during earlier periods, when it was often assumed that grievances are sufficient to explain collective action. But in the 1960s, his work converged with the growing conviction of social movement scholars that grievances alone cannot explain mobilization. Indeed, Olson argued that rational people, guided by individual interest, might very well *avoid* taking action when they see that others are willing to act on their behalf. From then

on, scholars of social movements would be obliged to wrestle with the puzzle of the free rider problem. In the hands of Mark Lichbach, it was specified as "the rebel's dilemma" (Lichbach 1995). Solving it became the central puzzle of Dennis Chong's work on the civil rights movement (1991).

Olson's integration into the study of contentious politics was slow and uneven. This was in part because, during a decade in which contentious politics was buzzing and blooming, he wanted to explain why collective action is *unlikely*. Other economists, like Albert Hirschman (1982) were quick to point to this paradox. Moreover, Olson seemed to limit the motivations for collective action to material incentives, ignoring the thousands of people who were striking, marching, rioting, and demonstrating in the 1960s on behalf of interests other than their own. Finally, although he named his theory *collective* action, Olson had little to say beyond *individual* motivations and the problem of their aggregation. He gave little attention to either the historical and institutional contexts of episodes of collective action or to interactions among actors, their opponents, their allies, and significant others. How could rational choice be reconciled with the buzzing and blooming movement cycle of the sixties? Two sociologists and a social psychologist proposed answers to this puzzle.

McCarthy and Zald Focus on Social Movement Organizations: An answer to Olson's paradox was proposed by sociologists John McCarthy and Mayer Zald. They took off from the empirical changes they saw in American society in the 1960s and 1970s -- already an advance on Olson's ahistorical deductions (McCarthy and Zald 1973). McCarthy and Zald focused on the resources available to collective actors in advanced industrial societies (1977). They agreed with Olson that the collective action problem was real, but they went on to argue that the expanded personal resources, professionalization, and financial support available to citizens in these societies provided them with an answer to the dilemma -- *professional movement organizations*.² The collective action problem was real but so were the solutions to it that social movement organizations were designed to enact.

This emphasis on organizational means to solve the collective action problem was a disappointment to European critics looking for explanations of the ultimate origins of whole movements, but it lent a refreshing concreteness to the study of movements (McCarthy and Zald eds 1987) and led to two decades of productive work on the organizational aspects of social movements (Klandermans, ed. 1989; Davis et al. 2005). It also produced a cottage industry of criticisms of resource mobilization. For one thing, McCarthy and Zald had adopted the cold language of economics (e.g., they wrote of movement "entrepreneurs," "movement industries", movement "sectors") repelling scholar/activists who were hot from the movements

² Zald's dissertation and first book (1970), unsurprisingly, dealt with the formation, transformation, and politics of the YMCA.

of the 1960s. Where, their critics asked, were ideology, commitment, values? For another, they posited organization as a precondition for mobilization and ignored the self-production of grassroots organizations in the process of mobilization. Particularly as grassroots movements began to arise around the environment, the bomb, and gender and sexual choice, an alternative model, emphasizing informal participation and internal democracy, arose (Evans and Boyte 1987; Fantasia 1988; Rosenthal and Schwartz 1989).

A major lacuna in early resource mobilization was that, in their shift towards organization and away from grievances, McCarthy and Zald deflected attention from the micro-mobilization of individuals. Dutch social psychologist Bert Klandermans tried to specify the *process* through which individuals come to participate in social movement activities (1984). He saw a funnel of causation in which movement entrepreneurs look for support within a broad but inert protest potential; narrow it through the stages of "action mobilization" and "consensus mobilization", and mount collective action among a subset of those potential participants who were originally targeted (1988). Klandermans' emphasis on the social construction of protest (1992) converged with the newly-developing focus on the "framing" of collective action and with the study of movement discourse Gamson (1988). In their disillusionment with resource mobilization's utilitarian emphasis, some scholars found a paradigmatic alternative in the cultural and constructivist approaches that began to diffuse in the social sciences in the 1980s.

C. The Construction of Contention

As in the study of international relations, the constructivist school in the study of contentious politics grew out of a paradigm shift away from structural models. The forerunner was Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci (1980, 1985, 1989). Melucci was among the first to see social movements not as unitary actors but as centers of collective negotiation of collective identities (1989). He also saw movements as carriers of new cultural codes. This was classical constructivism, but Melucci's emphasis on negotiation also led to more rigorous attention to social networks, best reflected in the work of his student, Mario Diani (1995). Constructivism also grew out of the isolated but inspiring work of Murray Edelman whose 1971 book, *Politics as Symbolic Action*, was an early call to a more cultural approach to the study of contentious politics.

Constructivism first influenced students of the identity movements that developed out of the 1960s -- especially the women's and gay and lesbian movements (Rupp and Taylor 1987). These movements and those who studied them focused heavily on the importance of naming and on the development of new identities through practice. In a parallel development, constructivism was being applied at the same time to nationalism, where the idea of "imagining" nations was famously diffused by Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1990).

Eventually, some scholars concluded that *all* movements construct meanings and began to see meaning construction as a movement's primary function (Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

The social-psychological and the cultural strands of constructivism came together in the work of David Snow and his collaborators (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; 2000) who adopted and adapted Goffman's (1974) concept of framing. These scholars also helped to stimulate the contemporary interest in the mechanisms and processes in contentious politics (see Part 3 below). Less interested in the content of the frames that collective actors use, they focused on the processes through which these actors align their frames with – or seek to transform -- cultural understandings (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 2000). Frame articulation. Frame alignment, frame bridging, expansion, transformation" and diffusion are the dynamic mechanisms that Snow and his collaborators developed to describe the intersection between collective action frames and general cultural understandings. As a result of Snow and his collaborators' work on the frontier of culture and social psychology, "framing work" has become one of the major functions of social movement organizations. But framing is also done by the media (Ferree et al. 2002), and by grassroots activists who construct movements from below (Lichterman 1996).

Framing has been absorbed into the main social movement canon (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald eds., 1996), a development which has made that canon less "instrumental" than some of its critics maintain (Goodwin and Jasper, eds. 2004). But culturalists do emphasize issues that are given shorter shrift in "instrumental" approaches, such as emotions (Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Polletta 2006). One abiding difference is in methodological preferences: while political process theorists tend to favor event histories and resource mobilization theorists favor organizational studies, culturalists have a natural affinity for ethnographic methods. We can see this best in the work of political anthropologist James Scott.

Scott Takes Constructivism South: Scott was among the earliest and most influential proponents of an ethnographic approach to the study of third world insurgency. Also influenced by his colleague, Murray Edelman (1971), in the 1970s, Scott applied E.P. Thompson's moral economy concept (1966) to subsistence peasants in Southeast Asia. Although he earned the ire of a rationalist, Samuel Popkin, (1977) for this move, Scott's first book, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976), remained connected to the structuralist paradigm that still dominated the study of third world peasantries. After all, it was the *structure* of subsistence land tenure relations that produced the culture of reciprocity between landlords and peasants that Scott called the moral economy. By the 1980s, however, Scott had departed from structuralism altogether, deriving an ethnographic method from

Geertzian interpretive theory (1973) and focusing on individual resistance and the “hidden transcripts” on which it is based (1985).

The problem with Scott’s concept was that – once conceptualized – it was hard to put empirical borders around the concept of “everyday resistance”. When a subsistence peasant failed to tip his hat to a landowner was he expressing resistance or was the sun too hot that day? And when does everyday resistance give way to more overt forms of contention? Scott was good at teasing out the pre-political forms of resistance he found among Southeast Asian peasants; but his work provided little evidence about the mechanisms and processes that turn everyday resistance into openly contentious politics. Although his work stands among scholars of the global South and goes beyond the classical concept of “social movements”, more widely used by scholars of social movements was the concept of “framing,” as it was put forward by Snow and his collaborators.

D. Searches for Synthesis

To summarize what we have argued so far: the three major paradigms around which this volume is organized all had expressions in different schools of study of contentious politics from the 1960s to the 1990s:

- The structuralist paradigm had its reflection in the *political process* model and in the Moorian/Skocpolian school of revolution studies
- The *rationalist* paradigm was best reflected in the *resource mobilization* approach and its derivatives
- The *cultural turn* was best reflected in the study of *framing* and of the *construction of collective identities*.

Some scholars embraced either structuralism, rationalism, or culturalism as master narratives, pushing the margins of each approach as far as it would go to demonstrate its strengths and identify its limits (Lichbach 1994; 1995). But by the mid-1990s, some scholars wearied of what one of us called “paradigm warfare” (Tarrow 2004b) and began looking across these traditions for modes of synthesis. The first to do so were John McCarthy, Mayer Zald and one of the present authors (McCarthy, McAdam and Zald 1996), who attempted to synthesize the three approaches above in their edited volume, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. A second effort came from two Italian scholars, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, who synthesized political opportunity, movement framing, and social network theory into a single model of social movements (1999). After the turn of the century, both Aminzade and his collaborators (2001) and Snow and a group of largely sociological contributors organized an influential reader along similar lines (Snow, Soule and Kriesi eds., 2004).

But there were limits even to these synthetic efforts. For a start, most of them centered on the specific field of social movements," which could theoretically include a wide variety of forms of contention, but, in practice, was mainly based on reformist social movements in Western Europe and the United States. They made no attempt to include the violent insurgencies and civil wars that scholars like Collier and Hoeffler (1998), Fearon and Laitin (2003), Sambanis (2004), and most notably Gurr and his collaborators (1993) were exploring. Nor did they have much to say -- at least at first -- about NGO advocacy in the international arena, which was to produce a growth industry of research on "activists beyond borders" (Keck and Sikkink 1998), or about the recent explosion of terrorism that has led to a largely distinct literature of its own (Sageman 2004; Berman and Laitin 2004).

We think that much of this diverse work deserves to be integrated with the common core of social movement-based research, but we do not believe that general covering laws of the type "all collective action is aimed at producing improvements in individuals' material situations," or the equally reductive "all collective action is aimed at constructing collective identities" is going to do the job. Even within the specific field of social movements, individuals and groups exhibit an enormous range of motivations, and when we turn to forms of action like insurgencies, civil wars and terrorism, that range of motives widens still further. In our view, what is needed is a synthetic approach that combines *a search for common mechanisms and processes with knowledge of specific forms of contentious politics -- like social movements and civil wars -- in particular contexts*. In the remainder of this chapter, we first focus on the mechanisms and processes that we see driving different forms of contentious politics; and then survey recent work on social movements and civil wars as examples of how a synthetic approach can help to illuminate similarities and differences in different forms of contention. We close by focusing on unresolved problems in the field of contentious politics.

III. Mechanisms and Processes

Beginning in the 1980s, comparative and IR scholars both focused on the processes that drive political change. Two groups of scholars argued that the dominant correlational logic in regression analyses and other forms of statistical study leave great holes in the relations between independent and dependent variables. International Relations specialist Alexander George cast the first blow against the hegemony of correlational logic with his paper on "Case Studies and Theory Development" (1979). Working with Timothy McKeown, George followed up with an important paper on organizational decision-making (1985). The publication of King, Keohane and Verba's definitive book on causal inference applying the template of mainstream quantification to qualitative work, *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994), led to a forceful reaction among qualitatively-oriented scholars, which culminated in David Brady's and David Collier's edited book, *Rethinking Social*

Inquiry, in 2004, and to a symposium on that book in *Political Analysis* in 2006. George's IR-based research program expanded into comparative politics with the publication, in 2005, of his and Andrew Bennett's *Case Study and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*.

Both the George et al. and Brady and Collier research programs focused heavily on case studies, a preference that not all researchers will share. More important for our purposes, both teams put forward a strong case for process-oriented research, not as an alternative to mainstream quantification but as its complement. We identify strongly with the George and Brady/Collier emphasis on carrying out systematic analyses of political processes. For example, we think that scholars of contentious politics will learn more from focusing on entire *episodes* of contention than from studies of single movement organizations or even of entire movements. Episodes can be decomposed into their causal mechanisms and then reassembled into more general accounts of the processes involved. This process of disaggregation and re-aggregation produces analytic narratives in which actors interact with other actors (Bates et al. 1998; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001) rather than occupying center stage of the analysis, as they do in much of the social movement literature.

However, neither Brady/Collier nor George and his collaborators named or disaggregated political processes. We think processes can be usefully divided into their component mechanisms, which are both empirically more tractable and more easily compared, than in the examination of broad macro-processes, which risk turning research into traditional historical narratives. Mechanisms are the causal links between independent and dependent variables, which we would define as events that produce the same immediate effects over a wide range of circumstances. Five major mechanisms, drawn from the literature on contentious politics, illustrate the kinds of building blocks that drive episodes of contention and their outcomes.

The mechanism that we call *brokerage*, for example, is the production of a new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites. Its importance for contentious politics is that it lowers the cost of communication and coordination between these sites. Social movements often employ brokerage to bring previously unconnected groups or social networks into the same campaign. Brokerage also adapts general norms or frames to local contexts, as Sally Merry found in her work on the domestication of international human rights norms (Merry 2006; also see Tarrow 2005).

Another important mechanism in contentious politics is *identity shift*, as people who previously thought of themselves in a variety of distinct social role come together to realize a unified – if temporary – identity such as worker, victim of pollution, African American or citizen of the world. Related to identity shift is

boundary Formation, the creation of an us-them distinction between two political actors. Identity shift and boundary formation are important mechanisms in the escalation of ethnic conflict as well as in the civil rights movement, with Martin Luther King's call for the creation of "a new Negro" (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001: ch. 10).

Co-optation, the incorporation of a previously excluded political actor into some center of power, is a recurring mechanism in the history of contentious politics. It has been recognized as a central part of the dynamics of contention since Michel's work on *Political Parties* (1962). For example, it was traced by Piven and Cloward in their study of *Poor People's Movements* (1977). Related to co-optation is the broader process of *institutionalization*: the routinization of forms of collective action and of the groups that participate in it (Zald and Ash Garner 1987; Meyer and Tarrow ed., 1998)

Diffusion is the spread of a contentious performance, issue, or interpretive frame from one site to another. Without some kind of diffusion, local episodes of contention would remain local, and national ones would not spread to other countries (McAdam and Rucht 1993). This mechanism was central to Sarah Soule's work on the anti-Apartheid movement in the United States (Soule 1997), as it was in Sean Chabot's careful tracing of the spread of the Gandhian repertoire from India (2002). Recently, the advent of the Internet has given an entire new scope to diffusion and to the means by which it occurs. For example, the global justice organization ATTAC was able to diffuse rapidly from France across Europe partly through the availability of the new media (Kolb 2005).

Finally, *repression*, action by authorities that increases the cost – actual or potential -- of an actor's claim making is a continual threat to contentious politics. There is a wealth of evidence on both the correlates and the outcomes of repression in work by Francisco (1996), Rasler (1996) and Moore (1998), and in the studies collected by della Porta and Rieter on protest policing and by Charles Brockett on repression and protest cycles in the social movement tradition (della Porta and Rieter 1998; Brockett 2005). The opposite of repression, of course, is *facilitation*, which social movement scholars have developed out of Tilly's early work (1979) into the broader concept of political opportunity structure.

Many of these mechanisms have been identified in specific forms of contention (for example, identity shift and boundary formation in ethnic movements; the cooptation of social movements and their transformation into interest groups), while others have been observed in sites that are not usually considered contentious, but really are (Binder 2002). What we wish to underscore is that many of them are not limited to particular forms of contention and can therefore be used both to trace the *dynamics of contention* and to compare *different forms of contention*. For example, the combination of repression against some groups and

facilitation of others can produce the radicalization of the former and the institutionalization of the latter. And the comparison of the mechanisms that drive different forms – like social movements and civil wars – can help us to sort out the common properties of contentious politics from their differences. By way of illustration, we examine a particular cluster of mechanisms that combine in the processes of mobilization and demobilization; in Part Four we will select two very different forms – social movements and civil wars -- to show how similar mechanisms occur in different forms of contention.

Mobilization: A Cluster of Mechanisms

Mobilization is central to all episodes of contention (McAdam et al. 2001: ch.3). Many scholars have identified a sequence of linked mechanisms that are present whenever mobilization occurs: the perception of a favorable balance of opportunities and threats, the social appropriation of existing organizational sites, the framing of the episode by all participants as demanding collective action, and the adoption of particular forms of collective action. Figure 1 summarizes the process as we specified it in our earlier work:

Figure 1 here

Examining different episodes of contention, we found these mechanisms regularly linking together. Think of the American civil rights movement: the growing domestic importance of the black vote, combined with increased international pressure on the U.S. to reform its racial practices in the context of the Cold War, provided new opportunities for civil rights leaders, while the move of southern Blacks to the cities reduced the threat of Jim Crow practices. Black churches offered organizational sites to appropriate, while Supreme Court and other policy changes supported a re-framing of The Problem of the South into the realization of the American rights tradition (McAdam 1999 [1982]). Other episodes of contention, like the Italian cycle of protest of the 1960s and 1970s, revealed similar combinations of mechanisms concatenating into a process of mobilization that initiated a broad cycle of contention (Tarrow 1989).

B. De-Mobilization: A Different Cluster of Mechanisms

But no process of mobilization is permanent; protest waves or cycles reverse themselves through the process of *de*-mobilization (Tarrow 1998: ch. 9; Koopmans 1993, 2004). Demobilization is a process that is sure to follow in the wake of all waves of protest, revolutions, and strike waves. At a minimum, it appears to contain three main mechanisms: cooptation, defection, and repression. Studies of the demobilization of radical movements in Western Europe and the United States showed that demobilization simultaneously combined the cooptation of some participants into political parties and unions, the defection of others into private life,

and the adoption of repressive practices by authorities (Tilly and Tarrow 2006:ch. 5). This led to the familiar polarization between factions of a movement – some of which became institutionalized while others either escalated into violence or retreated into sectarianism.

These generalizations do not have the status of general covering laws. The combinations of the mechanisms in the processes of mobilization and demobilization in the United States and Italy may eventually prove robust or they may not extend beyond the scope conditions of those two countries. For example, Rasler's work on the Intifada found both radicalization and intergroup competition in the Palestinian resistance but she did not find the same relationship between conventional and confrontational actions that Tarrow identified in Italy (Rasler 2004; Tarrow 1989). Nor do we claim that these mechanisms exhaust the operative processes in contentious politics. Our goal is to stimulate students to use, challenge, modify, reduce or expand the mechanisms we know about until their common features become clear.

Common features are more likely to occur within the same form of contentious politics but some mechanisms and processes are common to a variety of forms. For example, revolutions and civil wars actually resemble each other; looked at closely, both include deep political polarization, mobilization of military force, armed combat, capture of crucial territories, organizations, and personnel, competing claims to represent the national interest, and appeals for outside support. Yet they differ precisely in the intersections among regimes, political opportunity structures, and repertoires. Yet the segmentation of the field of contentious politics into the study of social movements, strike waves, rebellions, civil wars and revolutions has not allowed scholars to expand the use of comparative analysis beyond episodes of the same genre. In Part Four, by way of illustration, we present our view of the key features of social movements and civil wars to underscore their underlying similarities and sharp differences as forms of contentious politics.

IV Two Distinctive Forms of Contentious Politics

How do the forms of contentious politics that specialists commonly distinguish come into being and change? What distinguishes revolutions, coups, civil wars, ethnic rivalries, strikes, social movements, and other varieties of claim making from each other? Half of our answer should already be obvious: these labels name particular conjunctions among regimes, political opportunity structures, and repertoires. Social movements and civil wars both mobilize people into action, even if the resources, the contexts and the tools of mobilization differ. But they are bound to differ in at least some of the mechanisms and processes that drive them. Change and variation in repertoires occur in general because regimes, their political actors, and their political opportunity structures change and vary.

A. Social Movements

Many scholars and most activists use the term social movements to cover most or all of the overlap between contention and collective action, whether it is violent or nonviolent, brief or enduring, deeply cultural or overtly political. The same analysts often extend the term to the social background and cultural consequences of contention and collective action. Consider the broad use of the term women's movement in the United States: it has been employed to characterize a wide range of behavioral and institutional phenomena, all the way from organized attempts to make claims against governments and other actors, to the enhanced presence of women in the workplace, to outcomes like the creation of women's studies programs in universities and the use of feminist-fostered language among ordinary people.

Expansion of the term social movements to embrace most or all of contentious politics and their social bases and outcomes has some drawbacks: *First*, it makes systematic comparison between movements and other types of contention more difficult. *Second*, it makes it difficult to examine transitions between different forms of contention. *Third*, it obscures a fundamental historical fact. As we know them, social movements only took shape about two centuries ago, and only became widely available as means of popular claim making during the 20th century (Tilly 2004b).

In our definition, the social movement involves *sustained challenges to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of concerted public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment*. Social movements combine 1) sustained campaigns of claim making, 2) an array of public performances including marches, rallies, demonstrations, creation of specialized associations, public meetings, public statements, petitions, letter-writing, and lobbying, 3) repeated public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment by such means as wearing colors, marching in disciplined ranks, sporting badges that advertise the cause, displaying signs, chanting slogans, and picketing public buildings. This combination produces significantly fewer violent confrontations than civil wars, rebellions or revolutions, but it is more sustained than single protest events and less routinized than the activities of interest groups (Tilly and Tarrow 2006: ch. 6).

While revolutions occur more frequently in authoritarian regimes with relatively high-capacity governments, and civil wars break out more frequently in regimes with governments of low to medium capacity (Fearon and Laitin 2003), social movements occur more frequently in democratic or democratizing regimes in which opportunities for peaceful interaction can be easily seized and where repression is moderate. Different conjunctions of regimes, political opportunity structures, and repertoires underlie those differences. We cannot examine all the dimensions of regimes that are crucial in affecting the forms contention takes, but

two such dimensions are particularly important.³ Empirically, two dimensions of change and variation in regimes play large parts in the forms of contentious politics within those regimes: governmental capacity and the extent of democracy.

Capacity and Contention: Among other characteristics, high-capacity governments exert extensive control over available means of coercion, with the consequences that governmental opponents rarely have substantial force to deploy, governmental allies can rely on forceful backing, and contentious encounters between governmental agents and opponents typically involve large disparities of force. This produces at least the constraints that permit and encourage social movements to form. Low-capacity governments, in contrast, regularly experience the formation of rival coercive centers as well as struggle *among* those coercive centers the government itself lacks the means to suppress.

But high governmental capacity also channels a higher proportion of all contentious politics into encounters between governmental agents and others, because the higher stakes of governmental power draw political actors toward making claims on government and because the government's coercive forces regularly intervene in non-governmental struggles. The result is that many forms of contention that pit contenders against one another in low capacity regimes turn their attention towards the state in high capacity systems. Although social movements typically engage in private and intergroup activities as well, high capacity states draw their attention towards politics.

From non-democracy to democracy: The second major dimensions that conditions the forms of contentious politics is the degree of democracy in a regime. Democratization shapes the fundamental forms of contentious politics both by creating attractive arenas for relatively peaceful varieties of contention and by promoting the formation of institutions that in their turn facilitate distinctive repertoires: rights of assembly, association, and speech; relatively open and accessible mass media; political parties that also operate outside of electoral contests. Social movements flourish in democracies and semi-democracies for precisely these reasons: there they find the political opportunity structures we outlined in Part One to lead them into contentious engagement with other actors and elites in the context of state institutions. Undemocratic regimes lack – and suppress – the organizational infrastructure of social movements.

The particular histories and cultures of different regimes supply the other half of our answer to the question of variation among distinctive types of contentious politics. Innovation and historical accumulation within regimes do not operate at the level of particular groups of claimants and their objects alone. Innovation and

³ For one attempt to use such a framework to study the relationship between forms of regime and types of repertoire see Tilly (2006).

historical accumulation occur at the national and international scales as well. The examples of special purpose associations and elections illustrate this point.

Special purpose associations: Outside of elite clubs and chartered communities such as religious congregations and craft guilds, voluntary associations played no significant public part in contentious politics anywhere before the later 18th century. They existed in the form of regularly organized artistic, intellectual, sporting, and recreational networks. But they rarely made public, collective claims. Then associations took off, rapidly becoming one of the chief vehicles for mobilization of claim making. Both continuously existing associations (e.g. trade unions) and associations created for the occasion or issue (e.g. many a group labeled front, coalition, alliance, or citizens united for x or against y) became regular participants in contentious politics through much of the western world. Of course they depended on the expansion of civil liberties such as freedom of association, assembly, and speech. But their forms and practices evolved and diffused with the history of contention at the national scale.

Elections are ostensibly institutions only for structuring of highly contained collective action. But in fact, as elections developed in the West, they served as focal points for special purpose associations, networks of friends and family, and eventually trade unions and political parties that were not especially or essentially interested in electoral success. The legitimacy and legality of campaigning for elections allows both electoral and non-electoral associations to come into the open and express their views. Elections are a clear case of the generalization of democratic institutions to non-electoral contention. Their importance for contentious politics was illustrated between the 1990s and 2005 by the chain of anti-electoral fraud movements in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Bunce and Wolchik 2006).

C. Lethal Conflicts and Civil Wars

Large-scale lethal conflicts occur most often in regimes with intermediate and low levels of governmental capacity, including the unstable intermediate cases that David Laitin and James Fearon call “anocracies” (Laitin and Fearon 2003). Three forms of lethal conflict are often clustered in the literature on contentious politics and indeed overlap: *violent ethnic or religious conflicts*, *civil wars*, and *revolutions*. Much of what we say about civil wars will apply as well to these related forms but we focus on civil wars because they have produced a sharply defined literature very different from (and largely indifferent to) the literature on social movements.

Civil wars are *large-scale lethal conflicts in which the violence does not occur chiefly as a by-product of non-violent claim making, but forms part of claim making's central rationale*. With civil wars, we enter a realm in which both governments and other political actors regularly use organized armed force as they make claims.

Organized armed force ranges from local gangs to disciplined national armies, passing by militias, paramilitaries, private armies, and mercenaries. Sometimes organized armed force remains very one-sided, as when military units attack demonstrators or paramilitaries hunt down labor organizers. But it becomes especially lethal when at least two armed organizations battle each other.

Civil wars have special features that set them off from other forms of contentious politics. Two features in particular make a difference: the high stakes of claim making and the problem of sustaining armed force. Killing, wounding, and damaging affect the survival of participants well after the immediate struggle has ended. They break up families and communities, destroy available labor power, and eliminate means of production. In at least one fundamental way, civil wars differ sharply from social movements: with such high stakes, potential participants in violent encounters commonly flee them unless as participants they are likely to prevail or to get away unscathed. But once committed they exit less easily so long as their organization remains intact.

That brings us to the second point. Unlike recruiting people for demonstrations or public meetings, creating and maintaining armed force requires extensive resources. Some military organizations live on their own land, and draw support from their own communities. But they also need weapons, ammunition, information, means of communication, and personnel to replace those they lose. Occasionally mass killing occurs without much use of high-powered weapons. In the huge Rwandan genocide of 1994, for example, most killers slaughtered their victims with clubs, machetes, and other everyday tools. Even in that extreme case, however, the killing began with a well-trained presidential guard and militias organized by the ruling party. Reproducing a disciplined military organization depends on extensive brokerage and internal coordination. All forms of large-scale lethal conflict involve high stakes and disciplined military organizations.

Those are the differences between civil wars and social movements. Yet we soon recognize familiar mechanisms and processes. For example, the identity mechanisms outlined in Part 3 are fundamental where people are putting their lives on the line. As in social movements, fighters are mobilized into combat, conflict diffuses, groups construct boundaries between themselves and others, and political opportunities are seized and created. As in social movements, existing political opportunity structure regularly interacts with established repertoires to shape what sorts and degrees of large-scale violence can occur within a given regime. And the overall character of a political regime (especially the capacity of its central government and its degree of democracy) strongly affects the location and the sheer possibility of large-scale lethal conflict.

States were central to the formation and interaction of social movements and in the case of civil wars, their concentration of coercive power means that they will

be involved in civil wars in one or both of two ways: as direct participants in the conflict and/or as third parties whose own power the conflict threatens. High capacity states reduce the threat by making it difficult for anyone to create rival concentrations of coercive means within their territories – hence the predominance of conventional and confrontational – but not violent – forms of contentious politics; low capacity states more often face precisely the threat that some rival actor will build up a major concentration of coercive means and use it to topple existing rulers.

In civil wars, two dramatic possibilities loom larger than in social movement campaigns: regime split and transfer of power. The first is that entire regime will split, so that at least two different clusters of political actors, including agents of government have broken their alliances and routine interactions with the others. At the extreme, two rival governments or segments of government can contend with each other, as when a rebel army establishes control over a region far from a national capital, and acts like a government within that region.

Small transfers of power occur all the time in every regime: one political actor gains greater access to government, another loses access, and a third forms a new alliance with the rising actor. Competitive elections always involve some possibility of a greater realignment. Social movements position themselves within this game of marginal adjustment. But fundamental transfers of power more often occur in the company of the large-scale violence we find in civil wars.

Of course, this thumbnail comparison of social movements and civil wars is no more than a cartoon version of how a mechanism-and-process based comparison of different forms of contention could be framed. Delineating types of regime and their combination of capacities and degrees of democracy would be the first stage in organizing such a comparison; examining the forms of contention that arise in these regimes would follow; analyzing the interactions between regimes and forms of contention would take us far towards the construction of a comparative political science of contentious politics.

V. Contentious Politics and Comparative Politics

Since the first edition of this reader was published, a number of scholars have been sowing seeds to advance the goal of building an integrated approach to the study of contentious politics. A first group are attempting to test whether concepts developed in one part of the world – generally in advanced industrial democracies -- apply under other scope conditions. A second group are examining transitions from one form of contention to another. A third group are extending the boundaries of the study of contentious politics into transnational space. Here we provide only the briefest examples from some of these scholars' work.

Extending Scope Conditions in China: A political process approach to contentious politics has been applied to rural China by Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, (2006). As they gathered data on rural protest in China, it became clear to O'Brien and Li that what they "were observing did not fit snugly in the literatures on political participation, popular resistance, or social movements" (p. xii). Eschewing the area studies approaches that have dominated the study of Chinese contention, they deliberately engaged the western contentious politics literature, and found it both revealing and wanting: revealing in that it underscored commonalities between protest in China and elsewhere; and wanting in ignoring a form of contention that they call "rightful resistance". This is the phenomenon they find when aggrieved persons employ government committees and established values to persuade concerned elites to support their claims.

One may wonder whether, as O'Brien and Li contend, rightful resistance is specific to rural China (for example, the use of the doctrine of rights by the American civil rights movement similarly used an existing frame to justify its claims), but their work has clearly profited from a deliberate engagement with recent developments in the comparative field of contentious politics. And they have posed an important challenge to conventional thinking on the relations between regimes and forms of contention: while the conventional wisdom holds that authoritarian regimes foster largely *transgressive* forms of contention, the practice of rightful resistance in authoritarian China describes an alternative pattern: the use of the law, however biased against ordinary people, to incrementally advance the boundaries of rights. Other scholars of China, though less self-conscious about their connections to the contentious politics literature, are finding similar use of dominant norms and rules in workers' use of the law in urban China (Gallagher 2006).

Transitions between Forms of Contention: One of our major complaints about the state of play in the study of contentious politics is that its segmented nature limits comparisons and isolates students of each form of contention from one another. A major problem that results from this segmentation is that it makes it difficult to examine transitions between these forms. This is particularly true of the transition from peaceful protest to violent conflict. But scholars coming from the civil war tradition are beginning to bridge this gap.

Scholars working in the conflict studies tradition founded by Gurr have produced large databases on the causes, correlates, and outcomes of civil wars and ethnic conflicts. But most of the studies using these sources are wedded to a correlational logic that fails to specify the processes that produce violence out of non-violent forms of contention. For example, in their expansion and re-analysis of the "Minorities at Risk" dataset (Gurr et al. 1993), James Fearon and David Laitin definitively demonstrate a correlation between mountainous terrain and outbreaks of civil war (2003). But what are the *mechanisms* that are more likely to produce civil wars in (some) mountainous countries than in (most) relatively flat ones – think of Iraq! A number of complementary or competing mechanisms could explain the

correlation – social pressure to conform, topographic protection from governmental forces, the social solidarity of rural communities. Without an effort to specify and describe the connective tissue between the independent and dependent variables of interest, what could be a dynamic analysis remains largely static.

But in a series of papers and articles resulting from his work with the World Bank-sponsored project on civil wars (see Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2000; Collier and Sambanis 2005), Nicholas Sambanis has focused on the causal mechanisms that produce civil wars out of non-violent contention. He argues that “it is not as useful to view civil war outcomes as the result of deep-seated and hardly changing structural conditions as it is to observe the links among different forms of political violence and to analyze the dynamics of conflict escalation and the transitions from one form of violence to another” (2004: 260). Focusing on the process of escalation, Sambanis and Annalisa Zinn find that civil war onset is much more likely to occur if separatist conflict has already caused minor violence. They also find that separatist civil war is most likely to occur in countries in which many organizations are pursuing self-determination nonviolently. There is a clear bridge between nonviolent contentious politics over separatist aims and violent confrontations with the state (Sambanis and Zinn 2006).

Transnational Contention and Global Social Movements: Although many civil wars are exacerbated by external sponsors and international opportunities (Jenne 2006), they remain for the most part domestic in their dynamics. Not so our third example of integrative approaches – the study of transnational contention. This new wave of research promises to radically expand the range and depth of the study of contentious politics. It blends with a neighboring strand of research that developed during the 1990s – the study of “global civil society” (Florini 2003 and Clark 2003). It also draws on international relations approaches – particularly on constructivism, in a field until recently dominated by realism and neo-realism (Keck and Sikkink 1998). If non-state actors can exercise “soft power” in international arenas, then states may not be as predominant in world politics as neo-realists appear to believe.

Bolstered by the Internet, by cheap international transportation, and by the global diffusion of universalist cultural frames like human rights and protection of the environment (Boli and Thomas, eds. 1999), transnational actors are becoming both more numerous in world politics, more astute in their manipulation of the international environment, and more general in their claims (Smith 2006). For example, in the 1990s, a combination of NGOs, social movements, states and international organizations formed a powerful coalition to advance the banning of anti-personnel landmines (Cameron et al. 1998). Later in the decade, a coalition of diaspora groups, human rights advocates, and lawyers and magistrates in Europe and Latin America combined forces to indict former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet (Roht-Arriaza 2005). More recently, Europeans and Latin Americans have developed a robust social forum process around a series of annual global and

regional social forums (della Porta et al. 2007). Analyses of these episodes are producing evidence that challenges the predominant within-nation focus of the study of contentious politics

Thus far, the promise of this expansion of the study of contention beyond the nation-state has been only partially realized. First, the new emphasis on non-state actors in the international arena leaves ambiguous the enduring power of states – so dramatically evidenced in the exercise of American military expansion in the Middle-East since 2001. Second, the normative commitment of many authors to “good” social movements has led them to underestimate the political calculations and political exchange relations involved in the campaigns they study (but see Bob 2005). Third, while much has been made in this literature on the interaction of the local and the global, little progress has been made in specifying the political mechanisms and processes that link sub-national, national, and international actors.

Comparativist Margaret Keck and international relations specialist Kathryn Sikkink launched a program for the synthetic analysis of transnational advocacy with the publication of their study *Activists Beyond Borders* (1998). Eschewing grand and global metaphors like “global civil society” and focusing deliberately on the mechanisms in a process they called the “boomerang effect,” they described how domestic actors whose claims are blocked at home try to gain access to NGOs and other external actors to put pressure on their own governments. In the areas of human rights, on behalf of the environment, and in opposing violence against women, they showed how this process operates through loose and informal networks of activists, NGO advocates, state actors and officials of international institutions working on common issues that cross national boundaries (chs. 3-5).

VI. Open Questions in the Study of Contentious Politics

In broad relief, the field of contentious politics is still lively, still fragmented, and still more imagined than real. But scholars are thinking more broadly about the similarities and differences between movements and other forms of contention and attending more closely to the mechanisms and processes that connect them. In short, much progress has been made in moving toward a broader, more integrated study of non-routine contention. But lots of work remains to be done. In bringing this chapter to a close, we turn our attention to three topics that seem to us essential for the development of an integrated field of contentious politics. These are:

- the empirical features of a contentious episode,
- the relationship between “protest” and other forms of activity, and

- the methodological techniques for systematically identifying mechanisms and assessing their influence in contentious politics.

Episodes versus discrete forms of conflict: The first issue has to do with our argument above for substituting episodes of contention for the discrete forms of conflict that have served as the traditional focal points of work in the field. In focusing only on discrete forms of challenges to constituted authority, scholars have truncated our understanding of the broader conflict dynamics that shape — and indeed, quite often, precipitate — the challenges.

How to identify episodes, however, remains a knotty conceptual and theoretical problem. Analysts face hard choices among three very different approaches: 1) try to reconstruct what participants in contention experience as a single episode, for example by taking self-reports of staged events or campaigns as units of observation; 2) adopt conventions that already appear in reporting media, for example what newspapers count as riots or police count as encounters with rioters; 3) create arbitrary but uniform units of observation, for example by regrouping available accounts into one-day segments of interaction. Each has its advocates, its advantages, and its obvious limitations. But the choice among them does not depend on common sense or convenience so much as conflicting conceptions of what analysts are actually studying.

In the first choice, the actors' consciousness becomes central; analysts often think of their topic as something like "protest" or "resistance." In the second, culture and convention become more prominent; analysts are trying to locate contentious interaction within the available categories of its time-place setting. In the third, some more abstract view of contention prevails; analysts are seeking to identify common properties of contention across different forms of consciousness and various time-place settings. The catalogs of contentious events that have predominated in recent quantitative work implicitly favor the third approach, but their users often bend back their interpretations of findings toward the first or second (Franzosi 1995, 1998, McAdam 1982[1999], Olzak 1992, Rucht and Ohlemacher 1992, Rucht, Koopmans and Neidhardt 1999, Tarrow 1989, Tilly 1995, 2004a, Tilly and Tarrow 2006, appendices).

Analysts of contentious episodes also confront a second large choice. Open contention always depends on and interacts with non-contentious social life. How much of the context, preparation, off-stage negotiation, and aftermath should enter the description of episodes as such? Students of social movements often take very broad views of their subject, including a wide range of behavior that is not strictly speaking contentious on the ground that it is intrinsic to social movement action. Think of the practice of evangelical Christians "bearing witness against sin" in campaigns against alcohol and slavery in antebellum America (Young 2006); was their confession less a part of contentious politics than, say, the organizers of the

underground railroad that transported escaped slaves to Canada a few decades later (Piven 2006: ch. 3)? Analysts of strikes, in contrast, typically make much sharper distinctions between strike episodes as such and what happens in work settings that generate – or, for that matter, fail to generate – strikes. Where they draw lines between episodes and contexts significantly affects the inferences they can draw about causal mechanisms and processes.

Recent innovations in the use of event analysis have made it feasible to broaden the range of events studied by students of contentious politics using the same tools as traditional contentious event analysis. On-line sources broaden the range of information easily available to scholars; advances in data access and data processing facilitate inexpensive analysis, even by graduate students with limited resources; and the re-conceptualization of contentious politics from protest to contention in general invites scholars to examine all forms of public events – routine and unexpected, institutional and non-institutional around contentious issues.

In their work on immigrant collective action in western Europe, Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham have expanded the study of events from protest event analysis in the narrow sense to what they call “political claims analysis” (1999). They broaden the focus of their research to include all forms of the making of claims -- that is, “to all actions by all actors which are relevant to our political issue field” and to deliberately coding the discursive dimensions of these actions alongside the forms of action, the number of participants and other more objective dimensions of the actions they study (p. 204). In doing so, they expand the central tool of events analysis to comprehend aspects of contentious politics both within and outside of institutional politics. This takes us to some methodological considerations of a more general sort.

The methodological conundrum: Much less progress has been made with respect to identifying the appropriate methodology or methodologies for the study of a broad range of forms of contentious politics. The problem is much greater for students of the *dynamics* of contention than for those adopting a more conventional variable-based approach. Arguing for the causal importance of a given mechanism is one thing; but systematically demonstrating it empirically is quite another. By what criteria do scholars focus on some mechanisms rather than others (*Mobilization* 2003)? How can mechanisms be observed at work? And how can their impacts be assessed?

The good news is we see several viable strategies for documenting the empirical reality and effects of contentious mechanisms. That is what we mean to do here, at least in preliminary fashion. Specifically, we provide a brief sketch of how three very different methodological approaches can be applied to the study of contentious politics. The three methods are: (1) ethnographic fieldwork; (2)

naturalistic experiments; and (3) traditional variable based quantitative analysis of contentious events.

Ethnographic fieldwork. As the basis for our discussion of this particular method we turn first to Ann Mische's (2003, 2007) research on political activism among Brazilian youth organizations. Mische did extensive fieldwork in Brazil in 1994 and 1995, paying close attention to the formation and dissolution of coalitions among the broad range of organizations she studied. Much of her work focused on the "conversational mechanisms" that she felt mediated these processes. In particular, Mische identified four mechanisms as shaping the prospects for successful coalition formation. These are: *identity qualifying*, *temporal cuing*, *generality shifting*, and *multiple targeting* (2003).

A second example of ethnographic fieldwork is Lesley Wood's research on the diffusion of new tactics from transnational to local sites of contention. Working in Toronto and New York, Wood studied how the "Seattle model" of ludic, public performances was differentially diffused in two different opportunity structures (Wood 2004). In New York, organizers using direct action tactics readily adopted a significant part of the Seattle model, while in Toronto, protesters were less willing to embrace the new model. To examine the reasons for these variations, Wood looked at the transmitters of these new signals, the ties between them and the local receivers, and the particular contexts and organizational dynamics within the receiving sites. Wood's work shows how a mechanism – diffusion – dovetails with both the sources of a new performance and the structure of opportunities at its sites of reception.

Naturalistic experiments – Another option open to researchers is to use the experimental method to systematically interrogate the role of particular mechanisms in contention. William Gamson, Bruce Fireman, and Steven Rytina showed the promise of this approach a quarter of a century ago in their book, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (1982). The authors were interested in the small group dynamics that mediate the onset of contentious collective action. They began by placing an ad in a local paper inviting individuals to participate for pay in "research involving group discussion of community standards." When each of the 33 groups of participants assembled they were told the discussion they were going to have would establish the community standards that would determine the guilt or innocence of a gas station owner who was being stripped of his station by a national oil company for failure to live up to the "moral turpitude" clause of his contract. As the session unfolded the person in charge became increasingly coercive in his efforts to elicit statements supporting the oil company's position in the case. By session's end it was apparent that the group was clearly being used to subvert the criminal justice system and advance the interests of the oil company. And yet less than half of the groups revolted in the face of this transparent injustice. Less important than their specific findings was the methodological path the authors blazed in the study.

Gamson and his colleagues were actually searching for the *mechanisms* that shape the initial mobilization of contentious collective action.

Non-Mainstream quantitative analysis – It may seem odd to include conventional quantitative analysis in the list of methodological options available to those seeking to study contentious mechanisms. After all, it was the limits of static variable analysis that helped motivate our search for mechanisms in the first place. True enough, and consistent with this position, we continue to advocate methods that allow for the direct detection of mechanisms. But we are also pragmatists who appreciate the hold that traditional variable-based quantitative analysis has on the social sciences. We are also catholic in our methodological judgments, seeing *all* methods as ingenious, but at best crude vehicles for describing complex empirical realities. Given this premise, variable-based quantitative techniques may be among the cruder options for interrogating mechanisms, but used appropriately, they are not without value.

McAdam and Su (2002) made use of this approach in their study of the impact of Vietnam-era anti-war protests on congressional voting on war-related measures. The goal of the study was to see whether, controlling for other variables, the pace or character of the protests shaped the pace and/or valence of congressional voting. In theorizing possible effects, the authors distinguished between three possible mediating mechanisms. These are *threat*, *signaling*, and *public opinion shift*. The first two assumed a direct relationship between protest and voting, as mediated by an inferred cognitive process on the part of lawmakers. Especially violent or otherwise *threatening* protests were hypothesized to encourage House and Senate members to vote in more movement-favorable ways in hopes of damping down public anger and restoring public order. *Signaling* assumed that especially large, non-violent demonstrations serve as a kind of mobilized public opinion, encouraging elected representatives to align their policy preferences with those of moderate protestors. Finally, *public opinion shift* hypothesized a two step process with protest first encouraging a decline in public opinion support for the war, which, in turn, motivates lawmakers to align their voting behaviors with what they perceived as a general shift in the preferences of the electorate.

Unlike mainstream quantitative analysis, where the data are generally allowed to speak for themselves, this approach obligates the researcher to theorize about the dynamic mechanisms thought to account for whatever relationships they find. Secondly, researchers using different techniques may be inspired by quantitative work to design studies that more directly interrogate the mechanisms in question. This reversal of the conventional relationship between qualitative and quantitative techniques is something we very much want to encourage. Tradition has it that one employs “softer” qualitative methods to learn enough about a phenomenon to subject it to more “rigorous” quantitative analysis. In the search for robust mechanisms in contention, reversing the order of these two approaches strikes us as

more promising (Tarrow 2004a). Quantitative techniques can be used to identify—via significant statistical relationships—promising cites for more focused research using techniques better suited to the detection and measurement of mechanisms (for an example see Rasler 2004)..

These few suggestive examples hardly exhaust the methods that could be adapted to the integrated study of contentious politics. Nor do we pretend to have done more scratch the surface of the complex methodological issues posed by our agenda and that of others working in this field. What we hope to have conveyed by this brief discussion are the empirical viability and promise of the approach. When joined to the theoretical pluralism that animates our perspective, we remain convinced that the methodological approaches described here promise to move us well beyond the essentially static, structural “facts” that currently pass for knowledge in the study of social movements and revolution.

Where Next?

We have spelled out the consequences of defining a coherent field called contentious politics: public, collective making of consequential claims by connected clusters of persons on other clusters of persons or on major political actors, when at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a third party to the claims. Some students of political struggle will see this essay's approach to that field as eclectic, while others will see it as synthetic. Certainly we have drawn freely on structuralist, rationalist, and culturalist accounts of politics without much concern for priorities among them. Yet we claim that the analysis of contentious politics accomplishes a synthesis, however incomplete and provisional, of approaches that had previously seemed either unconnected or contradictory.

Two moves forward that synthesis. The first is to recognize that phenomena such as revolutions, social movements, nationalist mobilizations, civil wars, and democratization have common causal properties instead of each constituting an entirely separate causal domain. The second is to treat the causal properties as consisting of recurrent mechanisms and processes which in different combinations and sequences produce contrasting forms of collective claim making, from nonviolent to violent, from routine to extraordinary, from conservative to transformative.

These two moves have strong implications for the practice of comparative politics. Instead of continuing the age-old comparative study of revolutions, social movements, nationalist mobilizations, civil wars, and democratization taken separately, they call for comparisons among the whole range of contention in different times and places. Such comparisons should take political regimes explicitly into account, drawing on the systematic theory and evidence that are accumulating

on differences in contention among contrasting types of regimes. They should also incorporate rigorous documentation of contentious episodes, preferably examined comparatively and in substantial numbers rather than considered one at a time.

We do not deny that revolutions, social movements, nationalist mobilizations, civil wars, democratization, and other forms of contentious politics have some distinctive properties. The previous presence of revolutions and social movements within a regime or within connected regimes makes available models and memories that affect subsequent iterations of revolutions and movements. To that extent, each well-defined form of struggle has a history of its own. That history deserves tracing within regimes and comparatively across regimes. But the tracing should include, precisely, a search for the mechanisms and processes by which revolutions, social movements, and other forms of contentious politics generate models and memories, not to mention the mechanisms and processes by which models and memories influence contention. More generally, our proposed program of research and theory involves a relentless effort to identify robust mechanisms and processes that recur across the full range of contentious politics.

Even more ambitiously, we cling to the hope that the rigorous comparative study of contentious politics will illuminate connections between contentious and non-contentious politics: between civil wars, let us say, and routine forms of public administration, influence-peddling, legislative maneuvering, and military logistics. It would be a very bad joke if the study of contentious politics, after challenging excessively sharp distinctions among revolutions, social movements, and other forms of struggle, fostered the illusion of a *sui generis* realm, the realm of contention. The comparative study of contention should sharpen, not dull, scholars' awareness of causal connections among the multiple forms of political interaction, contentious and non-contentious, that take place daily within every regime.

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Figure 1. The Process of Emergent Mobilization



