Geography Compass 1/3 (2007): 607–622, 10.1111/j.1749-8198.2007.00014.x

The Geographies of Social Movements

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Abstract

This article aims to provide a review of how geographical concepts can help us better understand the development and effects of social movements. Geographers have been rather slow to analyze the specific processes and mechanisms that make it possible for people to cooperate and engage in sustained political struggles with rich and powerful adversaries. Not only has this inattention to social movements deprived the discipline of robust conceptual tools for analyzing contentious politics, it has also limited the discipline's abilities to contend with broader theoretical issues concerning collective action and agency in the political arena. Recent research into social movements has begun to fill this void. The article maintains that the most fruitful strategy for conceptualizing the geographical underpinnings of social movements would be to examine how issues of space, scale, and place affect the processes already identified in the established sociological and political science literature on social movements.

1 Introduction: The Geographies of Social Movements

Social movements are collective forms of contentious politics activated for the purposes of achieving political goals through nontraditional means (e.g. protest, boycotts, public campaigns versus strictly electoral politics) (McAdam et al. 2001). They are collective in the sense that individuals and organizations establish networks with one another in the hopes of attaining their common objective. They are contentious because in putting forth their claims, they come into conflict with the interests of others. And they are political because the state in one way or other is involved in this process, either as an object of claims, allies of certain forces, and/or monitors of contention (McAdam et al. 2001, 63; Tilly 2004). Social movements are different than parties and special-interest groups because they are *networks* of distinct organizations and individuals participating in an effort to realize a collective goal through nontraditional *means* (Della Porta and Diani 1999, 16). As horizontal and loosely constituted *networks*, they generate organizational and relational dynamics that are different from those found in hierarchical and centralized parties and organizations. Social movements also employ distinct *means* for pressing their claims (e.g. 'social movement repertoire'), including organizational techniques such as special-purpose associations and coalitions as well as the use of public rallies, solemn processions, vigils, demonstrations,

etc. The claims of most social movements express concerns for greater redistribution of resources and power, recognition of cultures and identities, or both. Some of today's most prominent social movements include antiglobalization, religious fundamentalist, and environmental movements; materializing in different ways at local, national, and international scales.

A sustained effort by human geographers to study and theorize social movements failed to coalesce until recently. Though many geographers displayed an interest in political reactions to deep-seated structural issues like uneven development, there was not much of an interest in examining the specific mechanisms that enabled people to mobilize collectively in response to a common set of grievances. In other words, social movements were not examined as an object of inquiry in their own right. Sociologists and political scientist, however, early on embarked on a research program that resulted in a series of concepts and theories that helped to reveal the complex processes and mechanisms involved in making social movements (McAdam 1982; McAdam et al. 2001; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Melucci 1996; Tarrow 1989, 1998, Tilly 1986; Touraine 1981). This literature showed that although people may be discontented with economic and political processes, they do not automatically form into political collectivities to transmit their grievances to the political sphere. For this to occur, people must perceive problems as presenting a threat to their common interests, resources need to be pooled and organized, beliefs in the cause must be constructed, political openings need to be available to advance the cause, etc. This literature, in other words, directly assessed the complex steps involved in translating grievances into collective action. Although some of this literature spilled over into geography, not enough geographers embraced it for it to make a significant impact on the discipline. That being said, increasing interest in social movements by geographers in recent years has resulted in greater efforts to link this core literature on social movements with the concepts of space, scale, and place (Bosco 2006; D'Arcus 2005; Featherstone 2003, 2005; Martin 2003; Martin and Miller 2003; Miller 2000, 2001; Routledge 1993, 1997, 2003; Wolford 2004).

This essay begins with a brief summary of the core literature on social movements. This is followed by a review of the principal interventions of geographers and spatially sensitive sociologists and political scientists in the field. The third section examines an emerging debate over whether territorial or relational conceptions of place are best suited for interpreting social movements.

1.1 THE CORE SOCIAL MOVEMENT LITERATURE: SOCIOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE ACCOUNTS

The earliest scholars (1920s to 1960s) to study social movements largely viewed them as *irrational* responses to *malfunctioning* institutions and norms (Della Porta and Diani 1999). This view came under sharp criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, as young scholars involved in Civil Rights, antiwar,

minority, and environmental social movements found that these collectivities were not only highly rational (in the sense that they possessed 'rational' interests, goals, and methods for deploying resources) but they were also capable of developing agendas to bring about positive social and political changes. Many adopted Mancur Olsen's *rational choice* approach to politics, arguing that self-interested individuals cooperate in contentious political activities because it is the only way to ensure sufficient resources (money, labor, knowledge, legitimacy) to press their claims within the state (Klandermans 1989; Knoke 1989; McCarthy 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1987). This approach, which came to be known as the 'resource mobilization approach', placed great emphasis on the roles organizations and institutions (organizations, coalitions, bureaucracies, divisions of labor, etc.) play in pooling, coordinating, and deploying resources in optimal ways (Kriesi 1996; McCarthy 1996).

Other researchers have paid closer attention to the ways in which the interaction between particular political systems and actors determine the size and intensity of social movements. This approach has become known as the 'political processes approach' (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1989, 1998; Tilly 1986). Elaborating on Peter Eisenger's concept of 'political opportunity structure', Sydney Tarrow argued that when the 'political opportunities' (e.g. strategic openings in the political system) facing social movements increase, the prospective risks of participating in the movement decrease, providing strong incentives for *more* people and organizations to participate in collective mobilizations. Tarrow defines the concept as the '. . . consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provides incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure' (1998, 77). Variation in political opportunities therefore explains cycles of expansion and contraction in social movements. He and others (Della Porta and Diani 1999; McAdam 1996) have identified four basic elements that structure the political opportunities of social movements: (i) the relative openness or closure of a political system; (ii) the stability of ruling elite alignments; (iii) the availability of elite allies in the system; and (iv) the degree of repressiveness.

The two approaches described above address how actors cooperate in risky collective enterprises and the political conditions that block or facilitate their efforts; however, they do not assess *why* social movements develop in the first place. European scholars in the 1970s and 1980s maintained that social movements reflect the contradictions associated with different periods of capitalist development (Castells 1982; Habermas 1984; Mellucci 1996; Offe 1985; Touraine 1981). The sharp inequalities between capital and labor in *industrial* societies (roughly from the 1850s to 1950s) contributed to generating working-class movements with claims centring on the redistribution of material and political resources. *Postindustrial* societies (roughly from the 1950s to present) have been characterized by the expansion of a professional middle class with fewer redistributive concerns, the

expansion of consumer capitalism that has commodified basic social reproductive functions, and the expansion of the bureaucratic states that has 'rationalized' everyday social relations. While postindustrial society has enhanced prosperity (when compared to the industrial societies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries), this gain has come at the cost of colonizing people's everyday lives ('life-worlds') by capitalist markets and state bureaucracies ('the system') (Habermas 1984). Consequently, the principal grievances of 'new' social movements – such as sexuality, environmental, minority, and regional movements – have crystallized around issues of regaining autonomy and control over identities and cultures. Recent research on transnational social movements (Ayres 2002; Bandy and Smith 2004; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Tarrow and McAdam 2005) indicates that neoliberal globalization has induced important changes in the grievance structures underlying social movements. Neoliberalism has both aggravated inequalities (class and regional inequalities) and increased control of large capitalist institutions (transnational corporations and governing institutions) over the everyday lives of people. This has resulted in the resurgence of working-class struggles alongside mobilizations concerned with culture, identity, and autonomy (Della Porta 2005; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005).

In spite of these important advances in the study of social movements, most contributors have conceived social movements as developing on the head of a pin (Martin and Miller 2003; Miller 2000, 2001). Recent writings by geographers have shown that far from being residual, space, place, and scale are foundational qualities in the birth, development, and death of social movements (Miller 2000, 42–43).

1.2 MAKING A LITERATURE ON THE GEOGRAPHIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

As noted above, human geographers have been rather late to study social movements as an object of analysis in its own right. Social movements were largely seen as natural by-products of deep structural contradiction that pit social classes against one another (Harvey 1978, 1985). This emphasis deprived the discipline of concepts needed to understand how actors collectively engage in contentious political activities. A recent surge in research on the subject has begun to fill this void.

2 Initial Interventions: From Spaces of Resistance to Geographies of Social Movements

A number of researchers have attempted to assess the geographical factors that give rise to social movements and differentiate them across space. In a study of nonviolent struggles in India, Paul Routledge (1993, 1997) argued that 'place' has a central role in shaping the claims, identities, and capacities of mobilized political agents.

> First, the concept of place informs us about why social movements occur where they do and the context within which, movement agency interpolates the social

> structure. Second, the concept of place informs us about the nature of specific movements . . . Finally . . . place provides the means of understanding the spirit of movement agency, that which inspires and motivate people, the articulation of the experiences of everyday life. (Routledge in Miller 2000, 37)

Following from this, Routledge advocated a context-based analysis of social movements, one that seeks to understand how the geographically uneven modes of exercising state and economic power intersect with people's everyday lives, combining to generate particular 'terrains' of resistance. More recent work by Routledge (2003) has emphasized how actors across specific terrains of resistance converge in transnational social movement networks, using these networks as spaces for negotiating and disputing interests, goals, and strategies.

Two edited volumes have contended with the broader issues of power and resistance: *Geographies of Resistance* (Pile and Keith 1997) and *Entanglements of Power* (Sharp et al. 2000). Drawing on poststructural developments in the discipline, these texts maintain that relations of resistance and domination are rendered utterly complex when articulated in specific spaces, places, and networks. This results in highly intricate 'entanglements of power', far removed from the neat domination/resistance binary underlying mainstream social sciences accounts of power.[1] Reflecting the arguments made by James Scott in his *Weapons of the Weak* (Scott 1987), both volumes maintain that resistance is often expressed through highly subtle tactical maneuverings between contending forces. Far from playing a residual role, the micropolitics of everyday resistance are the principal drivers in shaping power relations.

Another group of scholars have examined how space is used in the strategies and tactics of social movements. Herod's *Organizing the Landscape* (1998) demonstrates that far from being passive victims of capitalist development, the spatial and scalar strategies of unions have not only challenged capitalist development but have also played an important role in shaping the economic landscapes of capitalist societies (1998, 27–28). Herod and Wright's (2002) *Geographies of Power* focuses more narrowly on the scalar strategies of a variety of actors (from unions to households to environmental associations) engaged in complex power struggles across local and global arenas.

While these researchers have drawn from a broad range of theories to inform their interpretations of social movements and resistance (from political economy to poststructural perspectives), others have attempted to establish more direct links with the core social movement literature outlined above (Bosco 2006; D'Arcus 2005; Martin 2003; Martin and Miller 2003; Miller 2000, 2001; Wolford 2004). Byron Miller's book *Geography and Social Movements* is the most systematic effort to link geography with the core social movement literature. Drawing on the work of Jurgen Habermas, Miller (2000) argues that as state and economic systems unfold unevenly across space, they create highly differentiated modes for colonizing the

life-worlds of people. The inherently uneven geographical nature of this process can spark a plurality of social and political grievances. Geography also plays a central role in determining how resources are mobilized, with actors developing spatially sensitive strategies to raise money and recruits for their specific mobilizations. Finally, Miller examines how actors attempt to maximize their political opportunities by jumping *material* and *representational* scales (Miller 2000, 127).

3 Consolidating Concepts: Space, Scale, and Place

These different approaches to the spatial underpinnings of social movements have helped to place issues of agency at the center of geographical inquiry. Moreover, they have provided general guidelines for understanding how the concepts of space, scale, and place can be used to interpret the key processes involved in making social movements.

3.1 SPATIAL UNEVENNESS

The spatially uneven ways in which economic and political powers are articulated produce variations in the grievances and development trajectories of social movements (Miller 2000; Routledge 1997). Capitalist and state systems are not articulated evenly across space. The geographically uneven logic of economic and state power differentiates the grievances that give rise to social movements. Drawing on the work of Markussen, Miller (2000) notes that the uneven nature of economic booms and busts creates very different conditions of mobilization, with actors in certain areas organizing to contend with the negative externalities of rapid economic growth (environmental degradation, congestion, gentrification, housing shortages, etc.) and actors in other areas mobilizing to contend with the effects of economic decline (lack of jobs, urban blight, etc.). Similarly, mobilizations are formed in response to intensive state investments in certain areas (urban redevelopment, airport expansion, environmental projects) and disinvestment in others (inner city, military base shutdowns, welfare institutions). In this way, we can conceptualize the uneven articulation of economic and state power as macrolevel processes that geographically differentiate the grievance structures of social movements.

The uneven nature of capitalism not only differentiates grievance structures across space but also concentrates and disperses the resources needed to make social movements possible. Processes of urbanization have been particularly important in the process of concentrating resources. For instance, McAdam (1982) shows how the urbanization of the American South resulted in concentrating the organizational resources (churches, people, money, talent, social networks) of black Americans in a handful of urban centers (McAdam 1982). The spatial concentration of people and resources was an important step in making the Civil Rights movement because it allowed insurgents to strengthen their networks and to facilitate the pooling and deployment of

their collective resources. On the other hand, increased mobility of people and resources can diffuse resources, weaken social networks between potential allies, and place actors into territorial competition with one another; all factors that hinder the development of social movements (Auyero 2005). In particular, distance and mobility tend to result in weakening important social networks, which in turn limit the usefulness of networks for procuring key resources (Coleman 1988; Diani 1997). Transport and communication infrastructures have certainly contributed to mitigating these negative effects of geographical dispersion but they cannot overcome them entirely. Thus, social movements are highly susceptible to the different ways in which resources are concentrated and de-concentrated during each round of capitalist restructuring (Soja 1980).

Finally, the uneven articulation of *state power* can present remarkably different sets of political opportunities for actors in different locations. Social movements face political regimes with varying degrees of openness, and they operate in spaces regulated by different coercive instruments. The degree of political opportunities available to insurgents can vary sharply across political regimes. This can have a number of effects on the development trajectories of social movements. On the one hand, this may present a single social movement with an uneven political landscape that can result in the uneven development of the movement. For example, while unions affiliated with the nationally based American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations faced relatively favorable organizing environment in Northern states, unions in the South faced a very hostile environment. This political context resulted in a robust movement in the North and a rather anemic movement in the South (Herod 1998; Moody 1987). On the other hand, uneven political landscapes can increase barriers to cooperation. For instance, in her study of a health campaign between Mexican and US HIV organizations, Barnes shows that their embeddedness in distinctly different national political and institutional regimes presented organizations with very different sets of political risks and opportunities, which ultimately hindered their abilities to cooperate (Barnes 2004). Additionally, the coercive powers of the state are differentially deployed across space, creating an uneven patchwork of regulatory and repressive controls to contain 'hot spots' of social and political contention (Dikeç 2006; Mitchell and Staeheli 2005; Nelson 2006). These coercive controls can have a wide impact on the development of social movements, affecting both their capacities and tactics for making claims in the public arena.

3.2 SCALING POWER

Political power is not only unevenly articulated across space, but it is also across geographical scales. This results in the uneven scaling of political opportunities facing social movements. Social movements mostly operate at the intersection of a series of overlapping state spaces (municipality,

regions, nation state, international agencies), which provide a highly complex mix of opportunities and constraints for advancing their causes (Miller 2004; Sikkink 2005). In her discussion of transnational social movements, Sikkink (2005) maintains that political opportunities vary sharply between national and international scales depending on countries, international institutions, and nature of political issues. In certain instances, movements may have strong political alliances at the national scale but regulatory levers concerning an issue reside in international institutions with few openings. In other instances, the situation may be reversed, with national institutions charged with a particular issue remaining closed and international institutions displaying greater degrees of openness. Miller (2000) reminds us that this observation is also relevant for local, county, and regional institutions.

The uneven scaling of political opportunities has an important effect on the geographical strategies developed by both social movement organizations in the pursuit of their claims, and political elites in their efforts to outmaneuver insurgents. These strategies can be lumped under the general term of 'scale-jumping'. States often shift policy-making processes to those scales where popular pressure can be muted or diffused. When national officials transfer competencies over labor regulations to international institutions, they reduce the abilities of social movements to use electoral pressures as a lever to increase influence in the policy-making process. In addition, devolving welfare policies to local scales of government diffuses targets by requiring social movements to make claims in countless local bodies rather than a single national one. While politically astute rulers have shown great abilities to shift the scales of the policy-making process to evade pressures from below, social movements have also been effective at multiscalar strategies. Again drawing on the work of Sikkink (2005), she shows that movements often exploit opportunities at one scale to open up opportunities at others. In the campaign to have Pinochet tried in Chile, activists used opportunities and alliances developed at the international scale to pressure national institutions to open up and bring the former dictator to justice. This reflects one of several possible multiscalar strategies employed by social movements to achieve their objectives.

Embarking on these types of multiscalar strategies is by necessity a relational process requiring the development and reconfiguration of social networks across geographical and social boundaries. Tarrow and McAdam (2005) have called this process 'scale shift'. They identify two general mechanisms for achieving scale shift. 'Relational diffusion' refers to the extension of a movement through pre-existing relational ties. The existence of trust and shared identities contained in existing relational ties not only facilitates the spread of social movements, but it also provides a durable relational base for sustainable mobilizations. The trade-off is that because the spread is dependent on *existing* relational ties, the social and geographical reach of this scale shift tends to be limited and localized, which reduces the impact of these types of mobilizations on wider political worlds. The second

of these mechanisms is 'brokerage', which means that the spread of the mobilization results from linking two or more actors who were previously unconnected through various brokers (Tarrow and McAdam 2005, 127). This results in new relations across traditional geographical and social boundaries, enhancing the potential reach and effect of collective actors. Although brokerage can expand the scope of social movements, alliances resulting from brokerage are also more fragile because they are made of many different groups and possess weak mechanisms of social integration. Tarrow and McAdam use the American Civil Rights movement to illustrate their point. Until 1961, the movement had primarily spread through pre-established ties between churches and student groups (i.e. relational diffusion). This resulted in a movement with a durable and solid relational base built up through a tight network of urban nodes throughout the South. However, the limited geographical (South) and social (black) reach of the movement reduced its abilities to gain national support for its cause because it was seen by most as an expression of regional grievances. This prompted leaders of the movement to call for a shift in its geographical (Northward) and social (white institutions) reach. Southern activists established contacts with potential sympathizers (churches and college campuses) in the North to facilitate the spread of the movement. Relations between these different groups were initiated in university classrooms and campuses but ultimately solidified in an intensive campaign known as Freedom Summer. This heightened level of strategic coordination permitted the movement to use nationally acquired resources (money, information, media, legitimacy) to maximize the political effect of intensive localized mobilizations throughout the South. The coordination of extensive and intensive relations and resources ultimately allowed actors to 'nationalize' the movement and achieve far-reaching changes in federal policy on race relations. Nevertheless, heterogeneity and distance meant that internal relations remained unstable throughout, resulting in the network's rapid dissolution soon after the achievement of its goals.

3.3 PLACING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Researchers have also developed important insights into how the concept of place can be used to better our understanding of social movements. Sustained and proximate interaction over time can create strong trusting relations between actors, which can then be drawn on to enable collective action (Beaumont and Nicholls, forthcoming; Coleman 1988; Diani 1997; Granovetter 1983; Miller 2000; Tarrow and McAdam 2005; Tilly 2005). Networks of trusting people are important because they provide increased certainty that their precious resources (lives, goods, reputation) can be mobilized for a collective enterprise without concern for the malfeasance and incompetence of others (Tilly 2005). Not only do strong ties make the collective mobilization of resources possible, they also generate strong moral sanctions that reduce 'free-rider' problems. Strong ties therefore encourage

actors to contribute their resources to social movement campaigns and stick to these enterprises even when the risks of involvement mount. In his discussion of the Paris Commune, Gould (1993, 1995) demonstrates that strong ties developed in working-class neighborhoods provided the social solidarity that permitted residents to risk their lives to protect the Commune. 'What tied workers from different occupations together in the Commune were the tangible bonds they experienced as neighbors, not the abstract bonds of joint structural position in the capitalist mode of production' (1993, 751). To illustrate the point, Gould quotes a discussion between a priest and guardsman (Commune volunteer) on the latter's motives for fighting on behalf of the Commune: '"What!" said the priest, "you have twelve thousand francs in income, and you go along with these people?" [indicating the other guardsmen in the battalion]. "I can't leave," said the sergeant, "because what would my comrades from the *quartier* say?" ' (1993, 748). Although proximity is not the only condition for securing strong ties (kin networks, religious affiliations, and common history are also important), geographical stability increases the likelihood of repeated contacts and bonding experiences between people, which in turn favor stronger ties (Coleman 1988; Collins 2004).

'Sense of place' also plays a distinct role in shaping both the political claims of actors and the perception of political opportunities (Martin 2003; Routledge 1993, 2000). Struggles over space are often motivated and justified by different ways for valuing place. How adversaries construct these values are informed by contrasting 'senses of place', with contestants drawing upon different norms, ethics, and representations to inform their deeply held beliefs over how places should be used. These 'senses of place' shape the claims of a wide variety of mobilizations, including antigentrification struggles, environmental mobilizations, and religious disputes over 'holy' lands. Researchers have also examined how the 'sense of place' affects the discursive frameworks used to bind actors in social movements together. Representations of place are an important discursive element in the construction of these frames because they tend to serve as a common reference point for unifying groups against 'outside' forces. Wolford (2004) develops the concept of 'spatial imaginaries' to denote how representations of place and space affect these types of choices. Spatial imaginaries provide cognitive frameworks that mediate how actors evaluate the potential risks and opportunities of joining social movements. Potential recruits are more likely to perceive that opportunities outweigh risks when the spatial imaginaries used to frame a social movement are consistent with their own.

4 Point of Debate: Between Relational Flows and Territorial Power

A recent debate has emerged over whether traditional understandings of place and scale are adequate for understanding human behavior in a world made up of increasingly unstable flows. Two criticisms have been directed at territorialized conceptions of place and scale (Amin 2004; Amin and Thrift

2002; Massey 2004). First, Massey has argued that stressing the distinctiveness and internal cohesiveness of place based worlds has reinforced '. . . localist or nationalist claims to place based on eternal essential, and in consequence exclusive, characteristics of belonging . . .' (Massey 2004, 6). According to Massey, this view of place represents actors in discrete areas as bearing homogenous interests and identities that set them apart from actors in other locales, placing 'insiders' and 'outsiders' into perpetual struggles over the realization of conflicting interests. Rather than stress essentialized differences and zero-sum interactions, she argues that our conceptual frameworks should highlight the internal multiplicity of places, the pluralistic exchanges between actors within these areas, and the possibilities for relational interactions across different sites. Second, places are not only areas that are internally plural, but they are also linked up to a series of extensive economic, political, and cultural networks with varying geographical reach. Amin agues that geographical concepts (e.g. place, territory, scale) that stress internal coherency and boundedness reify socio-spatial relations in our globalizing world.

> In this emerging new order, spatial configuration and spatial boundaries are no longer purposively territorial or scalar, since the social, economic and political inside and outside are constituted through the topologies of actor networks which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution. (Amin 2004, 33)

Much of this argument has been directed at the ways in which scholars like Manuel Castells use space and place. For Castells (1997), globalization has intensified the disjuncture between the global and local. As power has concentrated in global networks ('spaces of flows'), associational and representational institutions remain circumscribed in localities ('spaces of places'). The possibility of using representative institutions to shape economic power structures on behalf of citizens has decreased with the advance of neoliberal globalization. Global elites are able to position themselves at the intersection of these global and local spaces, developing 'reflexive dispositions' that allow them to maximize their power in both. These worldly and cosmopolitan elites stand in contrast to nonelite locals. Structurally dispossessed of access to the space of flows, they are left with few options but to use the available associational and representational institutions in defensive maneuvers against the spaces of flows:

> Under such new conditions, civil societies shrink and disarticulate because there is no longer continuity between the logic of power-making in the global network and the logic of association and representation in specific societies and cultures. The search for meaning takes place then in the reconstruction of defensive identities around communal principles. Most of social action becomes organized in the opposition between unidentified flows and secluded identities. (Castells 1997, 12)

In this sense, social movements ultimately have little possibility of breaking from their territorial traps, mobilizing in reaction to the multiple threats

presented by the space of flows. It is precisely this use of place and space that Massey and Amin criticize.

Extending these arguments to explicitly deal with social movements, David Featherstone (2003, 2005) argues that in order to make sense of the complex nature of transnational movements we need to '. . . transcend a tendency in political geography to counterpose local and global, of space and place' (2003, 405). For Featherstone, the elements structuring differences and commonalities tend not to reflect strict territorial divides. Generally speaking, actors in places are not internally homogeneous and externally different from others. Interests and identities are formed *through* relational exchanges between multiple actors in and across different sites. He notes that, '. . . actors craft their political identities through the ways they engage with geographies of power relations. They do not have fixed interests constituted in relation to already existing spatial configurations of power' (2003, 408). A 'global sense of place' for Featherstone means that locations are traversed by wide range of power networks, with actors in different sites engaging with one another through a series of multiple relational exchanges.

While other researchers have shared the critique of Castells's dichotomous use of place and space, they have taken a more cautious stance, resisting the push to discard entirely with territorial concepts such as place and scale (Beaumont and Nicholls forthcoming; Bosco 2006; D'Arcus 2005; Martin 2003; Miller 2005). It is argued that while social movements may be increasingly made up of extensive and pluralistic relational flows, a number of factors continue to require their territorialization. First, it appears that political power continues to be institutionalized through distinct territorial boundaries (albeit messy) in spite of increased interdependencies and relational exchanges across state spaces (Brenner 2004; Mann 1997; Le Galès 2002; Tarrow and McAdam 2005). This has meant that the targets, opportunities, and strategies of social movements continue to be shaped through territorialized political structures and institutions. Recent studies into transnational social movements provide consistent empirical support for this basic observation (Bandy and Smith 2004; Marks and McAdam 1999; Sikkink 2005; Tarrow and McAdam 2005). Although actors have shown great ability at developing complex relational ties across these different political territorial units and are certainly not entrapped by any one of them, these units nevertheless continue to play key roles in structuring the trajectories of social movements.

It has been suggested that proximate relations continue to generate relational qualities that enable certain types of collective action. Beaumont and Nicholls (forthcoming) have argued that both territorially intensive and geographically extensive relations contribute distinct yet complimentary resources to social movements. Whereas territorially intensive relations permit the generation of certain high-grade resources (lives, reputations, tacit knowledge), geographically extensive relations facilitate the circulation

of more generic ones (money, codified information, political support) between distant actors. This formulation is consistent with Granovetter's (1983) discussion of the functional interdependence of strong and weak ties, whereby he suggests,

> . . . [A] division of labor between weak and strong ties: weak ties provide the bridges over which innovations cross the boundaries of social groups; the decision making, however, is influenced mainly by the strong-ties network in each group. (Granovetter 1983, 218–219)

Thus, rather than social movements fragmenting into countless reactive territorial clusters (Castells's view) or re-emerging as contingently connected points across loosely articulated networks (Featherstone's view), this argument maintains that successful social movements tend to depend on both territorially intensive and geographically extensive relations for pooling and deploying resources. At a more general level, the argument emphasizes the importance of concepts that can reveal the continued importance of territoriality in a world of increased relational flows.

5 Conclusion

Although geographers have been rather slow to confront social movements in a systematic way, recent writings on the subject have contributed to filling in an important void in the discipline. This research has helped human geographers to better understand the complex processes involved in transforming a loose group of actors into powerful forces of social and political change. As certain human geographers have established better ties with the core social movement literature, new intellectual bridges are being built that will permit the flow of concepts between these different fields. Geographers stand to gain from building on the rich theoretical and empirical writings on social movements rather than struggling to reinvent the wheel. The social movement literature also stands to gain by integrating key geographical concepts into their interpretations of grievance structures, resources, and political opportunity structures.

Biography

Walter J. Nicholls received his PhD from the Department of Urban Planning at University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Sociology at California State University Long Beach. He is primarily interested in inequalities, governance, and social movements in European and North American cities.

Note

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[1] The view that the mainstream social science perspective of 'power' has been based on a simple domination/resistance binary is not entirely correct. Functionalist sociologists like Talcott Parsons (1968) have long emphasized a collectivist view of power (power to). This view has been taken up most prominently in urban studies by regime theorists like Clarence Stone (1989). In addition, Michael Mann's (1986) treatment of power relations examines 'power over' and 'power to' as dialectically linked.

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