

CHAPTER 1

The Study of Social Movements

Recurring Questions, (Partially) Changing Answers

In the late 1960s, the world was apparently undergoing deep, dramatic transformations – even a revolution, some thought. American civil rights and antiwar movements, the Mai 1968 revolt in France, students’ protests in Germany, Britain, or Mexico, the workers-students coalitions of the 1969 Hot Autumn in Italy, the pro-democracy mobilizations in as diverse locations as Francoist Madrid and communist Prague, the growth of critical Catholicism from South America to Rome, the early signs of the women’s and environmental movements, that would have shaped the new politics of the 1970s: all these phenomena – and many more – suggested that deep changes were in the making. In 2018, the fiftieth anniversary of 1968 has stimulated reflections on its long-term effects not only on society and politics, but also on social movement studies (della Porta 2018a).

Accordingly, the study of social movements developed to an unprecedented pace into a major area of research. If, at the end of the 1940s, critics lamented the “crudely descriptive level of understanding and a relative lack of theory” (Strauss 1947, p. 352), and in the 1960s complained that “in the study of social changes, social movements have received relatively little emphasis” (Killian 1964, p. 426), by the mid-1970s, research into collective action was considered “one of the most vigorous areas of sociology” (Marx and Wood 1975). At the end of the 1980s, commentators talked of “an explosion, in the last ten years, of theoretical and empirical writings on social movements and collective action” (Morris and Herring 1987, p. 138; also see Rucht 1991).

Today, the study of social movements is solidly established, with specialized journals, book series, and professional associations. The excitement and optimism of the roaring 1960s may be long gone, but social and political events over the last four

decades have hardly rendered the investigation of grassroots activism any less relevant or urgent. To the contrary, social movements, protest actions and, more generally, political organizations unaligned with major political parties or trade unions have become a permanent component of Western democracies. It is no longer possible to describe protest politics, grassroots participation, or symbolic challenges as unconventional. References to a “movement society” (Dodson 2011; McCarthy, Rafail, and Gromis 2013; Melucci 1996; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Soule and Earl 2005) seem increasingly plausible, not only in the most advanced democracies but even in authoritarian regimes and in the Global South (della Porta 2017a).

To be sure, there has been considerable fluctuation in the intensity of collective action over this period, as there has been in its degree of radicalism, its specific forms, and its capacity to influence the political process. However, forecasts that the wave of protest of the late 1960s would quickly subside, and that “business as usual,” as represented by interest-based politics, organized according to traditional political divisions, would return in its wake, have largely been proved wrong. In different ways, and with a wide range of goals and values, various forms of protest have continued to emerge, in the Western world as well as elsewhere (Ballard, Habib, and Valodia 2006; Beissinger 2002; Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003; Broadbent and Brockman 2011; Kriesi et al. 1995). At the start of the new millennium, possibly for the first time since 1968, the wave of mobilizations for a globalization from below (often identified as global justice movement) mounted a new, global, challenge, combining themes typical of class movements with themes typical of new social movements, like ecology or gender equality (Arrighi and Silver 1999; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Smith 2008; Tarrow 2005). Later on, in Latin America as well as in North Africa, in Europe as well as in the United States, the Great Recession and austerity policies have triggered a broad wave of protests that have been influenced by the different times and forms of the financial crises, but also took inspiration from each other (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018; della Porta and Mattoni 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012; Rossi and von Bülow 2015).

In truth, speaking of “global justice movements” or “anti-austerity movements” as if they were unitary, homogeneous actors would be very misleading. The initiatives against neoliberal globalization or the elites’ management of the global crisis have been very heterogeneous, and not necessarily connected to each other. They have addressed a range of issues, from child labor’s exploitation by global brands to deforestation, from human rights in developing countries to military interventions by Western powers, from economic deprivation to threats to democracy. And they have done so in a myriad of forms, from individual utterances of dissent and individual behavior to mass collective events, and from a variety of points of view.

Looking at them well illustrates what doing *social movement analysis* actually means. In their research practice, most of the people who study social movements

focus either on individuals, organizations, or events, in the best instances trying to capture the interdependence between them:

- *Opposition to neoliberal policies can be looked at as the ensemble of individuals expressing opinions about certain issues, advocating or opposing social change.* Globalization has surely raised fears and hopes in equal measure, but the balance is distributed unequally across countries and socioeconomic areas. Repeatedly, public opinion surveys indicate diffuse worries about the impact of globalization over people's lives, both economically and politically. Although this may be more a diffused concern in Western Europe than in the United States or even more so elsewhere, globalization is undoubtedly at the core of public opinion's interest these days. Those who are skeptical and often hostile to it represent a distinct and vocal sector of public opinion. Their views are forged and reinforced in dialogue with a range of prominent opinion makers and public figures, exposing the costs and faults of globalization from a Western/Northern as well as an Eastern/Southern perspective, such as Indian writer Arundhati Roy, Philippine sociologist Walden Bello, Australian journalist John Pilger, or economist and Nobel laureate Josef Stiglitz. Books like Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (1999) may be safely credited with the same impact that Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), or the Club of Rome's report on *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Randers, and Behrens 1972) had on the spread of environmental concerns back in the 1960s and 1970s. Building on this sensitivity in public opinion, anti-austerity protests have also built on and fueled a widespread concern for economic inequalities and social injustice in the public opinion, that in large part started to stigmatize the elites (the 1%) as being responsible for the suffering of the people (the 99%) (Flesher Fominaya 2014; della Porta 2015a).
- *Individual opinions and concerns often turn into various forms of political and social participation.* Moral and philosophical worldviews and deeply felt convictions are then paralleled by specific attempts by individuals to stop threatening developments, redress instances of injustice, and promote alternative options to the managing of social life and economic activity. A possible way of looking at the movements for social justice and against inequalities is, then, by focusing on those individuals who actively express their opposition to neoliberal capitalism. By signing petitions calling for the cancellation of developing countries' debt, contributing money to the activities of various social movement organizations, mobilizing to stop the building of dams or the effects of extensive exploitation of land in Asia or Africa, blocking access to the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, or Occupying Wall Street, or attempting to stop ships exporting toxic waste to developing countries or trains carrying military equipment, individuals citizens may contribute to the campaigns against neoliberal globalization and its effects at domestic level. They may do so, however, also through actions that affect individual lifestyles and private behavior as

much – and possibly more – than the public sphere. Throughout the West, the recent years have seen the spread of fair trade organizations and practices that have been further fueled as direct practices aiming at the same time to criticize austerity policies and to build alternatives (Boström, Micheletti, and Oosterveer 2019; Monticelli and della Porta 2019). By consuming certain products or choosing to do business only with banks committed to uphold moral and ethical standards, individuals may try and affect the balance of economic power on a broad scale.

- *However, antiglobalization can hardly be reduced to sets of individuals with similar views and behavior.* Rather than on individual characteristics, it may also be interesting to concentrate on the properties of the events into which conflictual interactions take place between powerholders and their opponents; as well as in events in which individuals and organizations identifying with a cause meet to discuss strategies, to elaborate platforms and review their agendas. Global justice activists have been particularly good at staging events – or disrupting opponents’ events – with a strong emotional impact over public opinion and participants alike. Already before Seattle, periodical meetings by international bodies associated with the neoliberal agenda, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the G8, have provided the opportunity for a string of highly visible, very well attended demonstrations trying to both disrupt the specific gatherings and draw people’s attention toward alternative agenda. Events promoted by global justice activists, most notably the World Social Forum gatherings in Porto Alegre and in Mumbai, their European counterparts in Florence (2001), Paris (2003), or London (2004), the corresponding meetings in the South, such as the African Social Forum that met first in Bamako, Mali, in January 2002, all confirmed the vitality and strength of the “movement of movements” (Pianta 2001). Below the global level, critics of globalization have promoted thousands of events, ranging from confrontational demonstrations to presentations of reports or press releases, from religious vigils to squatting into military buildings. Located anywhere from the national to the very local level, those events also support popular views about the existence of a distinctive anti-globalization movement. As the Great Recession spread, protests shifted in scale, with very large waves organized by national networks of organizations mobilized against home evictions, cuts in welfare, privatization of public services, and the like. Long-lost protest camps in highly symbolic public spaces became, for a while, most lively innovation in the repertoire of contention, allowing for highly visible contestation of the existing order, but also the prefiguration of a different world.
- *Other times, by global justice movement are actually meant, first and foremost, the organizations operating on those issues.* The opposition to neoliberal globalization has been conducted by broad coalitions of organizations.

Some – probably most – of them had a long history of political and social activism, well spread over the political spectrum. In Seattle as well as in Genoa or elsewhere, involved in the demonstrations were established political parties, mostly if not exclusively from the left; trade unions, farmers, and other workers' organizations; ethnic organizations representing both native populations and migrant groups; consumers associations challenging multinational companies; religious organizations and church groups; environmental groups; women's associations; radical autonomous youth centers (Italy's *centri sociali*); and the like. But the criticism of neoliberal globalization has also produced specific organizations, such as Attac, who advocate the so-called Tobin tax to reduce financial gains in the international stock market; People's Global Action, a coalition of hundreds of groups in the North and the South; or the Rete Lilliput, a net of groupings, associations, and individuals active in Italy on environmental, fair trade, and social justice issues. Beyond the global justice movement, also in other recent mobilizations. The role of organizations that are not directly political is particularly worth mentioning. The spread of fair trade practices is facilitated by the existence of extended networks of cooperatives and small retail operators in the West, who try somehow to reach a balance between ethic-driven public action and market requirements. The reproduction of countercultural networks linking radical activists from all over the place is likewise facilitated by the existence of alternative cafes, bookshops, social and cultural centers, offering meeting points – as well as at times accommodation – to people identifying with radical milieus. From a totally different perspective, the network of Islamic schools, mosques, and other institutions offering support to fundamentalist versions of Islam may also be regarded as providing the organizational infrastructure for the diffusion of that particular version of the opposition to Western globalization (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003). In 2011, the spreading of protest camps from Tahrir in Cairo to Puerta del Sol in Madrid and Sintagma in Athens – and then to Gezi Park in Istanbul and Maidan in Ukraine, built on existing organizational networks at various geographical levels (della Porta and Mattoni 2014). Whatever their specificity, organizations secure continuity to collective action even when the potential for spontaneous, unmediated participation somehow subsides. They also provide resources and opportunities for action to escalate when opportunities are more favorable; as well as sources for the creation and reproduction of loyalties and collective identities.

1.1 FOUR CORE QUESTIONS FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

As the example of global justice and anti-austerity campaigning suggests, studying social movements means focusing on at least some of the dimensions we have just introduced, as well as, most important, on how ideas, individuals, events, and

organizations are linked to each other in broader processes of collective action, with some continuity over time. Given their complex, multidimensional nature, it is no surprise that social movements may be approached in reference to very diverse intellectual questions. In this book, we shall focus on four sets of them, broadly articulated. We shall try to relate them to the broader theoretical and practical concerns that have inspired the analysis of grassroots political action and cultural resistance since the 1960s.

The first set of questions refers to the relationship between structural change and transformations in patterns of social conflict. Can we see social movements as expressions of conflicts? And what conflicts? Have there been changes in the main conflicts addressed by social movements? And along what lines? Is class conflict coming back as dominant cleavage? How do different cleavages interact and intersect?

Another set of questions has to do with the role of cultural representations in social conflict. How are social problems identified as potential objects of collective action? How do certain social actors come to develop a sense of commonality and to identify with the same "collective we"? And how can specific protest events come to be perceived as part of the same conflict? Where do social movement cultures and values originate from? Is the construction of collective identities hampered in liquid post-modernity, or does insecurity fuel the emergence of strong identification with larger or smaller imagined communities?

A third set of questions addresses the process through which values, interests, and ideas get turned into collective action. How does it become possible to mobilize and face the risks and costs of protest activity? What is the role of identities and symbols, emotions, organizations, and networks in explaining the start and persistence of collective action? What forms do organizations take in their attempts to maximize the strength of collective challenges and their outcomes but also to develop new knowledge and prefigure a different future?

Finally, it has frequently been asked, how does a certain social, political, and/or cultural context affect social movements' chances of success, and the forms they take? What explains the varying intensity over time of collective violence and other types of public challenges against power holders? Do the traits of political systems and their attitudes toward citizens' demands influence challengers' impact in the political arena? How do protest tactics and strategies adapt to or challenge the closing down and opening up of opportunities? And how do movements themselves construct and appropriate opportunities even in moments of extensive threats?

While these questions certainly do not entirely reflect the richness of current debates on collective action and social movements, they have surely played a significant role in shaping discussions over the last decades. Indeed, the 1960s were important because they saw not only an increase in new forms of political participation but also a change in the main conflictual issues. Traditionally, social movements had focused mainly on issues of labor and nation: since the 1960s, "new social movements" emerged instead on concerns such as women's liberation and environmental

protection. These changes in the quantity and quality of protest prompted significant innovations in social scientists' approach to those questions. The principal theoretical models available at the time for the interpretation of social conflict – the Marxist model and the structural-functionalist model – both came to be regarded as largely inadequate.

In Europe, scholars confronted with the new wave of protest often relied on Marxism. However, their attempts to explain developments in the forms of conflict in the 1960s encountered a number of problems. The social transformations that occurred after the end of the Second World War had put the centrality of the capital-labor conflict into question. The widening of access to higher education or the entry *en masse* of women into the labor market had created new structural possibilities for conflict, and increased the relevance of other criteria of social stratification – such as gender relations.

Indeed, even the most superficial observer of the 1960s could not help noticing that many of the actors engaged in those conflicts (youth, women, new professional groups) could only partly be related to the class conflicts, which had constituted the principal component of political cleavages in industrial societies (Rokkan 1970; Tilly 2004a). Problems posed by Marxist interpretations did not, however, relate only to doubts about the continued existence of the working class in postindustrial society: they also concerned the logic of the explanatory model. The deterministic element of the Marxist tradition – the conviction that the evolution of social and political conflicts was conditioned largely by the level of development of productive forces and by the dynamic of class relations – was rejected. So was the tendency, particularly strong among orthodox Marxists, to deny the multiplicity of concerns and conflicts within real movements, and to construct, in preference, outlandish images of movements as homogeneous actors with a high level of strategic ability (for a critique: Touraine 1981).

In America, collective action was often seen as crisis behavior. Having reduced collective phenomena to the sum of individual behaviors, psychologically derived theories defined social movements as the manifestation of feelings of deprivation experienced by individuals in relation to other social subjects, and of feelings of aggression resulting from a wide range of frustrated expectations. Phenomena such as the rise of Nazism, the American Civil War, or the movement of black Americans, for example, were considered to be aggressive reactions resulting either from a rapid and unexpected end to periods of economic well-being and of increased expectations on a worldwide scale; or from status inconsistency mechanisms (Davies 1969; Gurr 1970). From a somewhat different but compatible point of view, the emergence of political extremism was also associated with the spread of mass society in which integrative social ties based in the family or the community tended to become fragmented (Gusfield 1963; Kornhauser 1959). Isolation and displacement produced individuals with fewer intellectual, professional and/or political resources, who were particularly vulnerable to the appeal of antidemocratic movements of the right and the left.

To some extent, these problems were shared by the most famous version of structural-functionalist approach, that of Neil Smelser (1962), that saw social movements as the side effects of overrapid social transformation. According to Smelser, in a system made up of balanced subsystems, collective behavior reveals tensions which homoeostatic rebalancing mechanisms cannot absorb in the short term. At times of rapid, large-scale transformations, the emergence of collective behaviors – religious cults, secret societies, political sects, economic Utopias – has a double meaning, reflecting on the one hand, the inability of institutions and social control mechanisms to reproduce social cohesion; on the other, attempts by society to react to crisis situations through the development of shared beliefs, on which to base new foundations for collective solidarity.

Smelser's value-added model of collective behavior consists of six steps: structural conduciveness, i.e., a certain configuration of social structure that may facilitate or constrain the emergence of specific types of collective behavior; structural strain, i.e., the fact that at least some trait of the social system is experienced by a collectivity as a source of tension and problems; growth and spread of generalized belief, i.e., the emergence of a shared interpretation by social actors of their situation and problems; precipitating factors, i.e., stressful events that induce actors to take action; mobilization, i.e., the network and organizational activities that transform potential for action into real action; operation of social control, i.e., the role of social control agencies and other actors in shaping the evolution of collective behavior and its forms (see also Crossley 2002, p. 2; Smelser 1962).

Some scholars regard as unfortunate that Smelser's work came out at the time it did, thus ending up being strongly associated with the crisis of the functionalist paradigm. Despite its problems, his was a major attempt to connect into an integrated model different processes that would have later been treated in sparse order, and to firmly locate social movement analysis in the framework of general sociology (Crossley 2002, p. 53–55). Whatever the case, Smelser's approach came to be subsumed under the broader set of approaches viewing social movements as purely reactive responses to social crisis and as the outcome of malintegration, and became the target for the same criticisms. Let us see now how the criticism of Marxist and functionalist approaches were elaborated in relation to the four questions we have identified earlier, but also how those answers were themselves challenged later on.

1.1.1 Is Social Change Creating the Conditions for the Emergence of New Movements?

Given the importance of Marxism in European intellectual debates, it is no surprise that European social sciences were the most eager to explain the rise of the movements of the 1960s and the 1970s in explicit critique of the Marxist models of interpretation of social conflict. Criticism addressed both the most structuralist currents of Marxist thinking, deriving class conflict directly from the mode of production, and those interested in the formation of class consciousness (or class *for itself*). Certainly,

scholars of the new movements were not the only ones to be aware of these problems. The same difficulties had been raised by those who had studied the labor movement with the aim of explaining the formation of a collective actor, challenging the widespread idea of an almost automatic transformation of structural strains in conscious behavior (Thompson 1963).

Departing often from a Marxist background, scholars associated with the *new social movements* approach made a decisive contribution to the development of the discussion of these issues by reflecting upon the innovation in the forms and contents of contemporary movements.

Scholars of new movements agreed that conflict among the industrial classes was of decreasing relevance, and similarly that the representation of movements as largely homogeneous subjects was no longer feasible. However, there were differences of emphasis in relation to the possibility of identifying the new central conflict which would characterize the model of the emerging society, defined at times as *postindustrial*, *post-Fordist*, *technocratic*, or *programmed*. An influential exponent of this approach, Alain Touraine, was the most explicit in upholding this position: "Social movements are not a marginal rejection of order, they are the central forces fighting one against the other to control the production of society by itself and the action of classes for the shaping of historicity" (Touraine 1981, p. 29). In the industrial society, the ruling class and the popular class oppose each other, as they did in the agrarian and the mercantile societies, and as they will do, according to Touraine, in the programmed society, where new social classes will replace capitalists and the working class as the central actors of the conflict.

The break between movements of the industrial society and new movements was also stressed in the 1980s by the German sociologist Claus Offe (1985). In his view, movements develop a fundamental, metapolitical critique of the social order and of representative democracy, challenging institutional assumptions regarding conventional ways of "doing politics," in the name of a radical democracy. Among the principal innovations of the new movements, in contrast with the workers' movement, are a critical ideology in relation to modernism and progress; decentralized and participatory organizational structures; defense of interpersonal solidarity against the great bureaucracies; and the reclamation of autonomous spaces, rather than material advantages.

Another contribution to the definition of the characteristics of new movements in the programmed society came from Alberto Melucci (1989, 1996). Drawing on the image proposed by Jürgen Habermas of a colonization of lifeworlds, Melucci described contemporary societies as highly differentiated systems, which invest increasingly in the creation of individual autonomous centers of action, at the same time as requiring closer integration, extending control over the motives for human action. In his view, new social movements try to oppose the intrusion of the state and the market into social life, reclaiming the individual's identity and the right to determine his or her private and affective life against the omnipresent and comprehensive manipulation of the system. Unlike the workers' movement, new social movements do not, in

Melucci's view, limit themselves to seeking material gain, but challenge the dominant notions of politics and of society themselves. New actors do not so much ask for an increase in state intervention, to guarantee security and well-being, but especially resist the expansion of political-administrative intervention in daily life and defend personal autonomy.

It would be misleading to speak of the new social movements approach without remarking that its principal exponents have considerably modified their positions over time. Already in the late 1980s, Offe (1990) recognized the influence of traditional-style political action on the practices of the movements. Melucci increasingly concentrated on the mechanisms by which certain representations of the world and of individual and collective identities are produced and transformed over time. Moreover, he went as far as to declare the debate of the "newness" of contemporary movements to be outdated or irrelevant (Melucci 1996).

This perspective had – and still has – several merits. First, it drew attention to the structural determinants of protest, reevaluating the importance of conflict, at a time when non-class conflicts were often ignored. Compared with the then-dominant Marxist interpretations, the theoreticians of new social movements had two specific advantages: they placed once again collective actors at the center of the stage; and they had the ability to capture the innovative characteristics of movements that no longer defined themselves principally in relation to the system of production. Despite the influence of the *new social movements* perspective, attention to the relationship between social structure and collective action is by no means restricted to it. A Marxian approach has continued to inspire numerous analysts of collective action who have maintained the concept of social class a central role in their analyses. In many senses, structural approaches strongly influenced by Marxism can be regarded as the predecessors of the thriving research on global justice and anti-austerity movements (Barker et al. 2014; Barker and Lavalette 2015). Some scholars have attempted to locate the new wave of popular mobilization in the global South as well as within the Western world in the context of much larger processes of economic restructuring on a global scale, and from a long term historical perspective, broadly inspired by Wallerstein's theory of the world system (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989; Reifer 2004; Silver 2003).

In explicit critique of analyses suggesting the demise of social conflict and its individualization, and most explicitly the end of conflict about distributive stakes, many scholars regard the crisis of the workers' movement in the 1980s and 1990s, following financial restructuring at the global level, as a largely conjunctural phenomenon. Systemic failure to meet the expectations of the working class from developing countries will fuel a new wave of sustained class conflicts, that will also reflect the growing feminization of the labor force and its stronger ethnic dimension, following mass migration dynamics (Arrighi and Silver 1999). The increasing relevance of "global justice" as a central concern (della Porta 2006) seems to support these arguments. Moreover, and rather unexpectedly, social movements have developed in the South, bridging frames and organizational structures with their northern counterparts. Especially in some geographical areas (such as Latin

America and the Far East) social movement research developed, often within a Gramscian approach, stressing the role of cultural hegemony. Not only research indicated that the class conflicts was well alive in many parts of the world, with a bias view of its decline deriving from a culturally bias focus on the North–West, but what is more Marxism was revisited as a potentially useful approach also to understand the growing focus on social inequality even at the core of the capitalist system (Silver and Karatasly 2014; della Porta 2015a; della Porta 2017b; Cini, Chironi, Dropalova and Tomasello 2018).

Another important attempt to relate social structural change to mass collective action has come from Manuel Castells (Castells 1983, 1997). In an earlier phase of his work, Castell has contributed to our understanding of the emergence of urban social movements by stressing the importance of consumption processes (in particular of collective consumption of public services and public goods) for class relations, by moving the focus of class analysis from capitalist relations within the workplace to social relations in the urban community (Castells, 1983). Later, Castells has linked the growing relevance of conflicts on identity both in the West (e.g. the women’s movement) and in the South (e.g. Zapatistas, religious fundamentalisms, etc.) to the emergence of a “network society,” where new information technologies play a central role.

Yet another original effort to link structural analysis and social movement analysis has been inspired by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Researchers engaged in the analysis of cultural habits (or the cultural predispositions produced by processes of socialization) as well as their structural determinants have used Bourdieu’s insights to explore specific instances of political conflicts, stressing their cultural meanings within the specific fields to which individuals belong. Going beyond economic interests, some scholars explained indeed social movement activism as following needs and desires that derive from values and norms that are typical of specific cultures (or fields). In this sense, action is not rational, but reasonable (Bourdieu 1992). In the Bourdesian perspective, pragmatic sociology has looked at social movements as carriers of broad cultural justifications and shifting capitalist conceptions (Boltanski and Chiappello 2005; Boltanski and Thevenot 1999). From a different angle, and with explicit reference to general theory à la Smelser, Crossley (2002) has used Bourdieu’s key concepts of habitus, structure, and agency to propose a new theoretical model, able to integrate the insights from European and American approaches over the years. In doing so, he has proceeded in parallel with other theoretical work in the broader framework of structuration theory (Livesay 2002; Sewell 1992).

A major criticism of new social movements theory has been that it took as foundational characteristics of new social movements certain traits that were not necessarily new and far from generalizable – such as activists’ middle class origins, or loose organizational forms (see e.g. Calhoun 1993; Kriesi et al. 1995; Rudig 1990). Structural approaches in general have also been faulted for failing to specify the mechanisms leading from structural tensions to action. In fairness, this criticism does not apply to Melucci’s work, and only partially to Touraine’s and

Bourdieu's (in any case, the latter's overall influence over social movement studies has been quite limited); while it is surely appropriate for scholars like Offe or Castells, or world system theorists, whose focus is clearly not on micro or meso processes. Certainly, it developed general theorization upon a specific historical context, considering as broad historical trends also some contingent transformations that affected especially some specific geopolitical areas (della Porta 2015a). Whatever the case, the approaches presented here must be regarded first of all as theories of social conflict, more specifically, of the impact of structural transformations over stakes and forms of conflict. And it is fair to say that the questions more directly related to the development of collective action have been more cogently addressed by other intellectual traditions.

1.1.2 How Do We Define Issues as Worthy Objects, and Actors as Worthy Subjects, of Collective Action?

In the 1950s and 1960s, students of collective behavior tended to classify under the same heading phenomena as diverse as crowds, movements, panic, manias, fashions, and so on. Two problems arose from this. On the one hand, although many of them defined movements as purposeful phenomena, students of collective behavior placed more attention on unexpected dynamics – such as circular reactions – rather than on deliberate organizational strategies or, more generally, on strategies devised by actors. As James Coleman recalled (1990, p. 479), the hypothesis that situations of frustration, rootlessness, deprivation and social crisis automatically produce revolts reduces collective action to an agglomeration of individual behaviors. Functionalism so ignores the dynamics by which feelings experienced at the (micro) level of the individual give rise to (macro) phenomena such as social movements or revolutions.

One response to these theoretical gaps has come from symbolic interactionists close to the so-called Chicago School, credited with having developed the analysis of collective behavior as a specialist field within sociology. The concept of collective *behavior* – contrasted with that of collective psychology – indicated the shift of attention from the motivation of individuals to their observable actions. Already in the 1920s, the founders of this approach – among them, Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess – had stressed that collective phenomena do not simply reflect social crisis but rather produce new norms and new solidarities, and viewed social movements as engines of change, primarily in relation to values systems. Subsequently, other students of collective behavior were to make reference to the tenets of the Chicago School, focusing their attention on situations of rapid change in social structures and prescriptions (Blumer 1951; Gusfield 1963; Turner and Killian 1987 [1957]). Tendencies toward large-scale organizations, population mobility, technological innovation, mass communications, and the decline of traditional cultural forms were all considered to be emerging conditions pushing individuals to search for new patterns of social organization. Collective behavior was in fact defined as behavior concerned with

change (for example, Blumer 1951, p. 199), and social movements as both an integral part of the normal functioning of society and the expression of a wider process of transformation.

Rooted in symbolic interactionism, the contemporary school of collective behavior sees particular relevance in the meaning actors attribute to social structures; and the less structured the situations faced by the individual, the more relevant this aspect appears to be. When existing systems of meaning do not constitute a sufficient basis for social action, new norms emerge, defining the existing situation as unjust and providing a justification for action (Turner and Killian 1987, p. 259). As an activity born outside preestablished social definitions, collective behavior is located beyond existing norms and ordered social relations. The study of collective behavior thus concentrates on the transformation of institutional behaviors through the action of emergent normative definitions. These definitions appear when the traditional normative structure comes into conflict with a continually evolving situation. As Blumer (1951, p. 169) put it:

Sociology in general is interested in studying the social order and its constituents (customs, rule, institution, etc.) as they are. Collective behavior is concerned in studying the way in which the social order comes to existence in the sense of the emergence and solidification of new forms of collective behavior.

Change, in fact, is conceived of as part of the physiological functioning of the system: social movements are accompanied by the emergence of new rules and norms, and represent attempts to transform existing norms. For example, Gusfield (1963) saw the prohibitionist movement as an area of conflict between social systems, cultures and groups of different status.

The genesis of social movements is in the coexistence of contrasting values systems and of groups in conflict with each other. These are regarded as distinctive parts of social life (Killian 1964, p. 433). Changes in the social structure and in the normative order are interpreted within a process of cultural evolution through which new ideas emerge in the minds of individuals. When traditional norms no longer succeed in providing a satisfactory structure for behavior, the individual is forced to challenge the social order through various forms of nonconformity. A social movement develops when a feeling of dissatisfaction spreads, and insufficiently flexible institutions are unable to respond.

The sociology of social movements owes many of its insights to students of the collective behavior school. For the first time, collective movements are defined as meaningful acts, driving often necessary and beneficial social change. Observations of processes of interaction determined by collective action moreover constitute important foundations for those who, in more recent times, have taken on the task of understanding movement dynamics. The emphasis on empirical research has led to experimentation with new techniques, providing through various methods of field research a valid integration of archive data. Since the 1980s, the interactionist version of the theory of collective behavior has stressed the processes

of symbolic production and of construction of identity, both of which are essential components of collective behavior. This has led to a research program that has lasted over time, as demonstrated by the work of scholars such as Joe Gusfield (1963), and that has become at the same time very influential and diversified (Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Melucci 1996; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Oliver and Snow 1995).

In the 1990s, however, some researchers grew dissatisfied with a view of the role of culture in collective action that they regarded as too strategic and rationalistic, in particular by scholars like Snow and Benford (1992) that were conversant with resource mobilization theory. They started to re-emphasize again the part played by emotions in the production and reproduction of social movements. In their view, symbolic production is not only (or mainly) strategically oriented, but it involves feelings and emotions. Moral shocks developing when deeply held rules and norms are broken are often first step in the individual mobilization and, indeed, protest organizations work at transforming fear in moral indignation and anger (Jasper 1997: 107–114). Movements indeed produce condensing symbols and rhetoric oriented to rise various types of emotions in what has been defined as a libidinal economy of movements. As Jasper (1997, p. 220) observed, “Virtually, all the pleasures that humans derive from social life are found in protest movements: a sense of community and identity; ongoing companionship and bonds with others; the variety and challenge of conversation, cooperation and competition. Some of the pleasures are not available in the routines of life.”

The stress on social movement as agents of normative change, that was present in the Chicago School, has been revisited in recent times of accelerated transformation within an emerging concern in social movement studies with “great transformations” as well as protests that – such as the protest camps – triggered big mobilizations (della Porta 2018b). Especially, as protests spread, new norms tend to emerge in the open spaces created by the social movements themselves. Such spaces allow for the development of intense emotions as well as the spreading of alternative visions through various forms of prefigurative politics oriented to practice changes (Wagner-Pacifi and Ruggiero 2018).

It is worth noting at least two main problems generated by the collective behavior perspective. On the one hand, despite defining movements as purposeful phenomena, many students of collective behavior placed more attention on unexpected dynamics – such as circular reactions – rather than on deliberate organizational strategies or, more generally, on strategies devised by rational, strategic actors. On the other hand, focusing on the empirical analysis of behavior, they are often limited to a description – albeit detailed – of reality, without devoting much attention to the structural origins of conflicts which subsequently well up in particular movements. While structuralist approaches like the new social movements dealt with the latter shortcoming, organizational perspective like the resource mobilization theory addressed the former. To its basic tenets we now turn.

1.1.3 How Is Collective Action Possible?

In deliberate contrast to conceptualizations of social movements as irrational, largely reactive phenomena, some American sociologists in the 1970s started to reflect on the processes by which the resources necessary for collective action are mobilized. In their view, collective movements constitute an extension of the conventional forms of political action; the actors engage in this act in a strategic way, following their interests; organizations and movement “entrepreneurs” have an essential role in the mobilization of collective resources on which action is founded. Movements are therefore part of the normal political process. Stressing the external obstacles and incentives, numerous pieces of research have examined the variety of resources to be mobilized, the links which social movements have with their allies, the tactics used by society to control or incorporate collective action, and its results. The basic questions addressed relate to the evaluation of costs and benefits of participation in social movement organizations.

In early contributions in this vein, Mayer Zald (McCarthy and Zald 1987; Zald and Ash 1966), Anthony Oberschall (1973, 1980) and Charles Tilly (1978) defined social movements as rational, purposeful, and organized actions. Collective action derives, according to this perspective, from a calculation of the costs and benefits, influenced by the presence of resources – in particular, by organization and by the strategic interactions necessary for the development of a social movement. In a historical situation in which feelings of unease, differences of opinion, conflicts of interest and opposing ideologies are always present, the emergence of collective action cannot be explained simply as having been caused by these elements. It is not enough to discover the existence of tensions and structural conflicts: we also have to study the conditions which enable discontent to be transformed into mobilization. The capacity for mobilization depends on the material resources (work, money, concrete benefits, services) and/or nonmaterial resources (authority, moral engagement, faith, friendship) available to the group. These resources are distributed across multiple objectives according to a rational calculation of costs and benefits. Beyond the existence of tensions, mobilization derives from the way in which social movements are able to organize discontent, reduce the costs of action, utilize and create solidarity networks, share incentives among members, and achieve external consensus. The type and nature of the resources available explain the tactical choices made by movements and the consequences of collective action on the social and political system (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; McCarthy and Zald 1987).

The existence of solidarity networks once again questioned a widely spread assumption at the time, namely, that movement recruits are mainly isolated and rootless individuals who seek to immerse themselves in the mass as a surrogate for their social marginalization. According to rational approaches, mobilization can thus be explained as being more than the gratification of pursuing a collective good; it also promotes the existence of horizontal solidarity links, within the collective, and vertical

links, integrating different collectives. On the basis of a wide range of empirical research, one can therefore foresee this phenomenon:

Participants in popular disturbances and activists in opposition organizations will be recruited primarily from previously active and relatively well-integrated individuals within the collectivity, whereas socially isolated, atomized, and uprooted individuals will be underrepresented, at least until the movement has become substantial.

(Oberschall 1973, p. 135)

Accordingly, scholars of resource mobilization concentrate their attention on how collective actors operate, how they acquire resources and mobilize support, both within and without their adherents' group.

Over the years, research on social movement organizations has extended its attention to the relations between organizations and the dynamics going on in organizational populations. Increasingly sophisticated network studies have looked at the interactions between the organizations and individuals identified with social movements (Diani 2015; Diani and McAdam 2003; Krinsky and Crossley 2014; Mische 2008). Concepts and methods borrowed from organizational theory have been applied to the study of the factors behind organizations' emergence and survival, again with reference to both the national and the global sphere (Atouba and Shumate 2010; Davis et al. 2008; Den Hond, De Bakker, and Smith 2015; Smith et al. 2018; Smith and Wiest 2012; Wijk et al. 2013).

The definition of social movements as conscious actors making *rational choices* is among the most important innovations of the resource mobilization approach. However, it has been the target of several criticisms. It has been charged with indifference to the structural sources of conflict and the specific stakes for the control of which social actors mobilize (Melucci 1989; Piven and Cloward 1992). Its emphasis on the resources controlled by a few political entrepreneurs, at the cost of overlooking the self-organization potential by the most dispossessed social groups, has also been criticized (Piven and Cloward 1992). Finally, it has been noted that in its explanation of collective action this approach overdoes the rationality of collective action, not taking the role of emotions adequately into account (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). In fact, as some of the most influential proponents of this approach admitted, "early resource mobilization models exaggerate the centrality of deliberative strategic decisions to social movements" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, p. 7), overemphasizing similarities between social movements and interest politics. As in organizational sociology neo-institutionalism focused attention to appropriateness rather than rationality, also social movement studies tended to give more attention to the importance of norms over means and on prefiguration as anticipation of the future (Tavory and Eliasoph 2013).

1.1.4 What Determines the Forms and Intensity of Collective Action?

A most cogent and systematic response to this question has come from the perspective usually defined as “political process” (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978). This approach shares with resource mobilization theory a strategic view of action – so much so that they are sometimes treated as a unified perspective – but pays more systematic attention to the political and institutional environment in which social movements operate. The central focus of “political process” theories is the relationship between institutional political actors and protest. In challenging a given political order, social movements interact with actors who enjoy a consolidated position in the polity. Charles Tilly (1978, p. 53) famously spoke of movements as “challengers,” contrasting them to established members of a given polity. The concept that has had the greatest success in defining the properties of the external environment, relevant to the development of social movements, is that of “political opportunity structure.” Peter Eisinger (1973) used this concept in a comparison of the results of protest in different American cities, focusing on the degree of openness (or closure) of the local political system. Other empirical research indicated important new variables, such as electoral instability (Piven and Cloward 1977), the availability of influential allies (Gamson 1990), and tolerance for protest among the elite (Jenkins and Perrow 1977). Sidney Tarrow integrated these empirical observations into a theoretical framework for his study of protest cycles in Italy, singling out the degree of openness or closure of formal political access, the degree of stability or instability of political alignments, the availability and strategic posture of potential allies and political conflicts between and within elites (Tarrow 1989, 1994).

To these variables others have been added, relating to the institutional conditions that regulate agenda-setting and decision-making processes. Characteristics relating to the functional division of power and also to geographical decentralization have been analyzed in order to understand the origins of protest and the forms it has taken. In general, the aim has been to observe which stable or ‘mobile’ characteristics of the political system influence the growth of less institutionalized political action in the course of what are defined as protest cycles (Tarrow 1989), as well as the forms these actions take in different historical contexts (Tilly 1978). The comparison between different political systems (for some pioneering works, see Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995; della Porta 1995) enabled the central theme of relationships between social movements and the institutional political system to be studied in depth.

The *political process* approach succeeded in shifting attention toward interactions between new and traditional actors, and between less conventional forms of action and institutionalized systems of interest representation. In this way, it is no longer possible to define movements as phenomena that are, of necessity, marginal and anti-institutional, expressions of dysfunctions of the system. A more fruitful route toward the interpretation of the political dimension of contemporary movements has been established.

One should not ignore, however, some persisting areas of difficulty. On the one hand, supporters of this perspective continue to debate delicate problems such as the choice of the most appropriate indicators to measure complex institutional phenomena. First, the lack of consensus on the relevant dimensions of the concept of political opportunities resulted in their exponential growth. Early studies of political opportunities focused on a small number of variables. Since the 1980s, however, the addition of new variables to the original set has expanded the explanatory power of the concept, but reduced its specificity. The concept runs the risk of becoming a ‘dustbin’ for any and every variable relevant to the development of social movements. Most of the concept’s problems arise from the way in which it has been developed, picking up variables from a variety of studies on a variety of movements. This accumulation of heterogeneous variables reflecting different authors’ concerns and ideas has resulted in a concept which, to quote Sartori (1970), denotes much but connotes little. Particularly in international comparative studies, it is impossible to handle the large number of variables and assess properly their explanatory power. Focus on structural variables might shift attention away from how norms and values, referring in particular to movements goals (or discursive opportunities), influence movement strategies as well as their chances of success (Goodwin 2011; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; Jasper 2018).

A second problem arises when we wish to distinguish between ‘objective’ reality and its social construction (Berger and Luckmann 1969). Some changes in the political opportunity structure do not have any effect on a social movement unless they are perceived as important by the movement itself. Structural availability must be filtered through a process of ‘cognitive liberation’ in order to unleash turmoil (McAdam 1986). For protest to emerge, activists must believe that an opportunity exists, that they have the power to bring about change and they must blame the system for the problem. Looking at structural opportunities without considering the cognitive processes that intervene between structure and action can be very misleading. It is important, therefore, to analyze activists’ understandings of available opportunities, the lenses through which they view potential opportunities for their movements (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Perceptions of state response may be particularly influenced, for instance, by its more dramatic manifestations, such as repression, causing the less visible responses, such as negotiation, to be overlooked.

The political process approach has also been criticized externally for its tendency to adopt a kind of “political reductionism” (Melucci 1987, 1989). In effect, its proponents have paid little attention to the fact that many contemporary movements (of youth, women, homosexuals or minority ethnic groups) have developed within a political context and in a climate of cultural innovation at the same time (Melucci 1996; Rupp and Taylor 1987). Lastly – as we have already noted when introducing resource mobilization theories – rationalist approaches to the study of collective action have tended to neglect the structural origins of protest. Other scholars, often associated with the new movements approach, have long pointed at this limit, by raising attention to the cultural dimension, while more recently Marxist approaches have returned upon the relevance of the interaction between the state and the market within the evolution of capitalism (Barker et al. 2014; della Porta 2015a). Within this

perspective, in a moment in which movements tend to proliferate even with a closing down of political opportunities, attention went to the role of socioeconomic threats as triggers for collective action (ibid.).

Faced with some relevant transformations in the two main sources of opportunities for movements – the nation-state and the political parties – research developed in two main directions. On the one hand, and especially in Europe, attention focused on the role played by movements, not just within the political system, but also within the public sphere. In this direction, the discursive opportunities – i.e., the presence of dominant public discourses on certain controversial issues, which are likely to affect movements' chances of success – have been stressed (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Moreover, more and more attention has been paid to transnational opportunities, or, better said, to a multilevel opportunity structure for movements (della Porta and Tarrow 2005). The development of the European Union as an arena for movement demands has been discussed more in depth (della Porta and Caiani 2009). Considering movements as part and parcel of the political system, an increasing number of studies has also focused on their effects, especially in terms of policy process and policy decisions (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2015). What is more, while social movements had been traditionally considered as 'strangers at the gate' of the political system (Tarrow 2012), in the turmoil of the Great Regression, social movements have been very effective in penetrating electoral politics through referendums from below as well as the proliferation of movements' parties (della Porta, O'Connor et al. 2017; della Porta, Fernandez et al. 2017).

1.1.5 Are These Questions Specific to Social Movement Analysis?

In this book we shall address these different questions: the social determinants of protest (chapter 2), the role of cultural and symbolic elements (chapters 3–4), the organizational dynamics (chapters 5–6), and the political context for and effects of movements (chapters 7–9). But, before doing that, we still have to discuss whether the questions – and the responses – identified above are peculiar to social movement research. In many cases, these questions address not just social movements but collective action more in general. Collective action broadly refers to individuals, sharing resources in pursuit of collective goods – i.e., goods that cannot be privatized and subtracted to any of the members of the collectivity on behalf of which collective action has taken place. Such goods may be produced within movements, but also in many contexts that normally are not associated with movements. In our notion, the idea of 'collective goods' comprises both public goods *à la* Olson and club goods. For Samuelson (1954), the key characteristics of public goods are non-excludability, and nonrivalrous consumption (i.e., no scarcity once the good is produced). A club good is nonexcludable for club members but excludable for outsiders, possibly (but not necessarily) non-rivalrous for those with access (Buchanan 1965).

For example, political parties also face the problem of mobilizing their members and providing them with incentives to join and somehow support the organization – if anything through the payment of membership fees; so do interest groups

only minding the sectoral – often, very parochial – interests of their specific reference groups (Jordan and Maloney 1997; Knoke 1990). Likewise, even political parties or narrow interest groups focus face the problem of adapting their strategies and tactics to changing environments, as the context in which they operate may become more or less favorable, such as through changes in the attitudes of power holders toward specific parties or interest groups' demands, changes in legal opportunities for interest representation, or changes in the cultural models with which ordinary people make sense of their political and social world (Panebianco 1988). From a different angle, many voluntary organizations do not identify any social or political opponent to protest against, and their strategies focus entirely on service delivery rather than advocacy, political representation, or challenges to dominant norms or lifestyles. Even these organizations, however, still face problems of attracting and keeping members, securing the resources necessary to promote action, elaborate the cultural models necessary to pursue goals along the desired lines, and framing their issues in order to make them as attractive as possible to the widest audience as possible (Wilson 2000).

As it happens, analyses of social movements and analyses of collective action at large are inextricably linked. Let us say that the experience of social movements reflects phenomena with more than passing analogies to other instance or political or cultural collective action, taking place within political parties, interest groups, or religious sects. Therefore, when we analyze social movements, we deal with social processes that may also be of interest to researchers who do not define themselves at all as social movement analysts. Accordingly, we feel that a lot of what is presented here may be of interest to a much broader audience.

Recently, there have been several attempts to synthesize scholarship on social movements with the aim of linking it to broader theoretical and/or empirical concerns. Some of these attempts have aimed at integrating social movement theory with general sociological frameworks.

A most ambitious development by social movement scholars, openly criticizing the insularity of the social movements studies community, and also drawing heavily on non-Western materials, has been the Dynamics of Contention (DOC) program (McAdam et al. 2001). The main suggestion coming from this approach has been the possibility to combine the knowledge developed in the fields of social movements with those elaborated on revolutions, democratization, and ethnic conflicts, singling out a field of contentious politics, defined as “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claim and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claim and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interest of at least one of the claimants” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, p. 5). As Sidney Tarrow (2015, p. 90) summarized, the contentious politics approach focused on episodes of contention, rather than on individual social movements, looking at the relations of different actors within complex political processes. Advocating a dynamic rather than static use of concepts, the scholars involved in this project have tried to single out general mechanisms of contention, defined as “delimited changes that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations”

(McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, pp. 24–25). While criticized for the uncertain status of the concept of causal mechanism as well as for the lack of capacity to account for causes and effects of social movements, the contentious politics approach has rightly pointed at the importance to bridge the field of social movements to other cognate fields (see Diani et al. 2003; Tarrow 2015 for discussions of the approach).

1.2 WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS?

If the core questions addressed by social movement analysts are not necessarily specific, one can wonder whether social movements have an analytical peculiarity that justifies the development of a distinctive field of research. In order to address this question, we have to discuss the concept of social movement.

1.2.1 The Concept of Social Movement

In a number of pieces, Mario Diani (1992, 1995, 2013; Diani and Bison 2004) has portrayed social movements as a distinct social process, characterized by the fact that actors engaged in collective action:

- hold conflictual orientations to clearly identified opponents.
- connect through dense, informal networks connect them.
- share a distinct collective identity.

We can look at these actions in more detail:

- *Conflictual collective action.* Social movement actors are engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts, meant to promote or oppose social change. By conflict we mean an oppositional relationship between actors who seek control of the same stake – be it political, economic, or cultural power – and in the process make negative claims on each other – i.e., demands which, if realized, would damage the interests of the other actors (Tilly 1978; Touraine 1981, p. 80–84). Accordingly, addressing collective problems, producing public goods, or expressing support to some moral values or principles does not automatically correspond to social movement action; the latter requires the identification of targets for collective efforts, specifically articulated in social or political terms. For example, collective action challenging austerity policies in countries like Greece (Kotronaki 2013; Seferiades 2013; Diani and Kousis 2014) is conflictual to the extent that organizations like the European Commission or the International Monetary Fund are blamed not because of their officials' misconduct or specific policy mistakes, but as representatives of distinct coalitions of interests. When collective action focuses exclusively on the behavior and/or the legitimacy of specific individuals, or blames problems on the humankind as a

whole, on natural disasters or divine will, then it is difficult to speak of social movement processes (Melucci 1996, Part I).

- *Dense informal networks.* Dense informal networks differentiate social movement processes from the innumerable instances in which collective action takes place and is coordinated mostly within the boundaries of specific organizations. A social movement process is in place to the extent that both individual and organized actors, while keeping their autonomy and independence, engage in sustained exchanges of resources in pursue of common goals. The coordination of specific initiatives, the regulation of individual actors' conduct, and the definition of strategies all depend on permanent negotiations between the individuals and the organizations involved in collective action. No single organized actor, no matter how powerful, can claim to represent a movement as a whole. It follows that more opportunities arise for highly committed and/or skilled individuals to play an independent role in the political process, than would be the case when action is concentrated within formal organizations.
- *Collective identity.* Social movements are not merely the sum of protest events on certain issues, or even of specific campaigns. To the contrary, a social movement process is in place only when collective identities develop, which go beyond specific campaigns and initiatives. Collective identity is strongly associated with recognition and the creation of connectedness (Pizzorno 1996; Tilly 2005). It brings with it a sense of common purpose and shared commitment to a cause, which enables single activists and/or organizations to regard themselves as inextricably linked to other actors, not necessarily identical but surely compatible, in a broader collective mobilization (Touraine 1981). For example, research on environmentalism suggested that animal rights activism were more distinctive and less identified with environmentalism in Britain than in Italy: as a result, it made much more sense to regard the two as involved in the same movement process in the latter than in the former (Rootes 2003). Likewise, not all networks between people holding similar beliefs and orientations necessarily reflect social movement processes: for example, the international Zapatista support network was not regarded by all analysts as a social movement because of the lack of a focused identity and the resulting bonds, even though resources of solidarity certainly circulated through it (Olesen 2004)). Even people who participated in major events like those that ultimately led to the demise of president Mubarak in Egypt in 2011 did not necessarily share long-term identities beyond the common goal of toppling the dictator (Sowers and Toensing 2012; Diani and Moffatt 2016).

Collective identity building also entails actors establishing connections between different occurrences, private and public, located at different points in time and space, which are relevant to their experience, and weaving them in broader, encompassing narratives (Melucci 1996; Tilly 2005). As a result, organizational and individual actors involved in collective action no longer merely pursue specific goals, but come to

regard themselves as elements of much larger and encompassing processes of change – or resistance to change. For example, in 2011, participants in events as distant as the Indignados square occupations in Spain and the anti-government protests in Tunisia or Egypt might have felt to be linked together through processes of identity building based upon the shared call for greater democracy and supranational communication. Within social movements, membership criteria are extremely unstable and ultimately dependent on mutual recognition between actors; the activity of boundary definition – i.e., of defining who is and who is not part of the network – indeed plays a central role in the emergence and shaping of collective action (Melucci 1996, ch.3).

Looking at different combinations of these three elements enables us to contrast social movements to other collective action processes. Here we provide a few examples; however, we have to keep in mind that no empirical episode of collective action – those that we conventionally define as environmental movements, solidarity movements, disabled movements, or the like – fully corresponds to any pure type. To the contrary, we can normally detect more than one process within any empirical instance of collective action. The exploration of how such processes interact with each other represents a fundamental step of social movement analysis.

1.2.2 Conflictual and Consensual Collective Action

It is not rare to witness broad coalitions of charities and other voluntary associations mobilizing on solidarity issues, such as on social exclusion in domestic politics, or on development or human rights issues in an international perspective, and to refer to them as social movements. In many cases, however, they might be best characterized as *consensus movements*. In both social movement and consensus movement dynamics, actors share solidarity and an interpretation of the world, enabling them to link specific acts and events in a longer time perspective. However, in the latter sustained collective action does not take a conflictual element. Collective goods are often produced through cooperative efforts that neither imply nor require the identification of specific adversaries, trying to reduce the assets and opportunities of one's group or preventing chances to expand them. Prospected solutions do not imply redistribution of power nor alterations in social structure but focus instead on service delivery, self-help, and personal and community empowerment. Likewise, the practice and promotion of alternative lifestyles need not the presence of opponents defined in social and political terms. Collective actors may fight ethereal adversaries, ranging from bad or conventional taste, in the case of artistic and style-oriented movements, to “the inner enemy,” in the case of some religious movements, without necessarily blaming any social actors for the state of things they intend to modify.

However, insisting on the presence of conflict as a distinctive trait of movements need not force social movement analysts away from the investigation of those instances of collective action where a conflict is difficult to identify, such as those oriented to personal change (e.g. the *human potential movement*, or many countercultural, alternative lifestyle networks) and those focusing on the delivery of some kind of help

or assistance to an aggrieved collectivity (e.g., solidarity movements: Giugni and Passy 2001; Brown and Yaffe 2013). This perspective implies, instead, that analysts recognize the presence of several social mechanisms or dynamics within each instance of collective action, and focus their efforts on exploring how such mechanisms operate and interact with each other.

1.2.3 Social Movements, Events, and Coalitions

We have a social movement dynamic going on when single episodes of collective action are perceived as components of a longer-lasting action, rather than discrete events; and when those who are engaged in them feel linked by ties of solidarity and of ideal communion with protagonists of other analogous mobilizations. Identity building also means that a sense of collective belonging can be maintained even after a specific initiative or a particular campaign has come to an end. The persistence of these feelings will have at least two important consequences. First, it will make the revival of mobilization in relation to the same goals easier, whenever favorable conditions recur. Movements often oscillate between brief phases of intense public activity and long latent periods (Melucci 1996) in which self-reflection and cultural production prevail. The trust and solidarity links, activated in the European antinuclear movements during the mobilizations of the second half of the 1970s, for example, represented the base on which a new wave of protests gathered momentum in the wake of the Chernobyl incident in 1986 (Flam 1994a). Second, representations of the world and collective identities that developed in a certain period can also facilitate, through a gradual transformation, the development of new movements and new solidarities. For example, the close relationship existing in several countries between different waves of activism has been noted on a number of occasions (Dalton 2008; Grasso 2016; della Porta 2018b).

Reference to other examples of informal networks of collective action, such as coalitions, also illustrates why collective identity is such a crucial feature of social movements. In coalition dynamics, collective actors are densely connected to each other in terms of alliances, and identify explicit opponents, but those links are not necessarily backed by strong identity links. The networks between actors mobilizing on a common goal take a purely contingent and instrumental nature. Resource mobilization and campaigning is then conducted mainly through exchanges and pooling of resources between distinct groups and organizations. The latter rather than the network are the main source of participants' identities and loyalties. Actors instrumentally share resources in order to achieve specific goals, yet do not develop any particular sense of belonging and of common future during the process. Once a specific battle has been fought, there need not be any longer term legacy in terms of identity and solidarity, nor attempts to connect the specific campaign in a broader framework (see e.g. Lemieux 1997, 1998). Of course, nothing prevents a coalitional dynamic from evolving into a social movement one, but it is still important to recognize the analytical difference between the two processes (Diani 2015).

It is worth stressing that associating movements to a distinctive collective identity implies no assumptions about the homogeneity of the actors sharing that identity. We have a social movement identity dynamic to the extent that groups and/or individuals feel part of a collectivity, mobilized to support or oppose social change; that they identify shared elements in their past, present, and future experiences; and that other social or political actors be held responsible for the state of affairs being challenged. Whether a specific collective identity will be inclusive or exclusive, and the degree to which holders of such identity will share one or several traits, is an empirical question (see chapter 4).

1.2.4 Social Movements and Organizational Processes

Social movements have traditionally been compared with political parties and interest groups as different types of political organization (for a classic formulation: Wilson 1973), as well as with religious sects and cults (see e.g. Bromley 2016; Robbins 1988). However, the difference between social movements and these and other organizations does not consist primarily of differences in organizational characteristics or patterns of behavior, but of the fact that social movements are not organizations, not even of a peculiar kind (Oliver 1989; Tilly 1994). They are networks which may either include formal organizations or not, depending on shifting circumstances. As a consequence, a single organization, whatever its dominant traits, is not a social movement. Of course it may be involved in a social movement process, but the two are not identical, as they reflect different organizational principles: “all too often we speak of movement strategy, tactics, leadership, membership, recruitment, division of labor, success and failure – terms that strictly apply only to coherent decision-making entities (i.e., organizations or groups), not to crowds, collectivities, or whole social movements” (Oliver 1989, p. 4).

Treating specific organizations like Oxfam or Greenpeace as *movements* does not add very much to the insights provided by concepts like *public interest group*. Similarly, religious organizations like Nichiren Shoshu or Hare Krishna may be more conveniently analyzed as *sects*. This concept takes into account the greater organizational rigidity and the more hierarchical structure that these organizations display by comparison with social movement networks (Robbins 1988, pp. 150–155). It also recognizes the higher degree of social control that is exerted over members. In contrast, what both “public interest group” and “sect” do not really capture are the interaction processes through which actors with different identities and orientations come to elaborate a shared system of beliefs and a sense of belonging, which exceeds by far the boundaries of any single group or organization, while maintaining at the same time their specificity and distinctive traits.

To shift the emphasis from single organizations to informal networks allows us, furthermore, to appreciate more fully the space reserved for individuals within movements. Individual participation is essential for movements, and one of their characteristics is, indeed, the sense of being involved in a collective endeavor – without

having automatically to belong to a specific organization. Strictly speaking, social movements do not have members, but participants. The participation of the individual, detached from specific organizational allegiances is not necessarily limited to single protest events. It can also develop within committees or working groups, or else in public meetings. Alternatively (when the possibility arises), one may support a movement by promoting its ideas and its point of view among institutions, other political actors, or the media. However, the existence of a range of possible ways of becoming involved means that the membership of movements can never be reduced to a single act of adhesion. It consists, rather, of a series of differentiated acts, which, taken together, reinforce the feeling of belonging and of identity.

If social movements are analytically different from social movement organizations, any organization which is involved in a social movement dynamic (i.e., which fulfills the requirements we have indicated: interactions with other actors, conflict, collective identity, and recourse to protest) may be regarded as a “social movement organization” (Diani 2012; 2015, p. 9). This may also hold for bureaucratic interest groups, and even political parties. By saying that political parties may be part of social movements we do not mean to suggest that social movements is a broader theoretical category in which several type of organizations (interest groups, community groups, political parties, and so forth) are represented as many subtypes. Rather, we suggest that under certain and specific conditions some political party may feel itself to be part of a movement and be recognized as such both by other actors in the movement and by the general public. Since the 1980s the Green parties provided a major example of political parties originating from social movements (Richardson and Rootes 1995); more recently, what are now referred to as “movement parties” (Kitschelt 2006) have grown to include political organizations originating from both left-wing and right-wing poles of the political spectrum. They have included parties close to the Indignados and anti-austerity movements like Podemos or Syriza as well as right-wing populist parties like the French Front National or the German Alternative fuer Deutschland (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; della Porta, Fernandez et al. 2017).

One could reasonably object that no matter how strong their identification with a movement, political parties actually perform specific functions at the level of interest representation and in this sense are different from social movements. That differences exist at the functional level is beyond question. Yet, the main peculiarity of social movements does not consist of their specific way of performing the function of interest representation. Of course, their networks of interaction favor the formulation of demands, the promotion of mobilization campaigns and the elaboration and diffusion of beliefs and collective identities. These factors all, in turn, contribute to redefining the cultural and political setting in which the action of interest representation takes place. However, when we focus on the function of interest representation in strict terms, we do not look at the way “the movement” performs this function. We look at the way different specific social movement organizations do this. Whether or not they decide to include participation in elections within their repertoire of action is dependent upon several factors including external opportunities, tactical and/or ideological considerations and their links to other actors in the movement. The mere fact

that they decide to do so, however, will not automatically exclude them from the movement. Rather, they will be part of two different systems of action (the party system and the social movement system), where they will play different roles. The way such roles are actually shaped will constitute a crucial area of investigation (see e.g. della Porta, Fernandez et al. 2017).

1.2.5 Social Movements and Protest

Until the early 1970s, debates on social movements emphasized their non-institutionalized nature (see e.g. Alberoni 1984). Even now, the idea that social movements may be distinguished from other political actors because of their adoption of ‘unusual’ patterns of political behavior is still very popular. Several scholars maintain that the fundamental distinction between movements and other social and political actors is to be found in the contrast between conventional styles of political participation (such as voting or lobbying political representatives) and public protest (Rucht 1995). Protest is undoubtedly a distinctive feature of political movements, on which we shall largely focus in this book; while it is less conspicuous among movements focusing on cultural and personal change, like religious or countercultural ones (Snow 2005).

There are some objections to considering protest a core feature even of political movements. First, public protest plays only a marginal role in movements concerned with personal and cultural change, in religious movements, and the like. Cultural conflict and symbolic challenges often take forms such as the practice of specific lifestyles, the adoption of certain clothes or haircut, and the adoption of rituals that can only be regarded as protest if we stretch the concept to a very considerable degree (Snow 2005). Moreover, even in the political realm it is increasingly debatable whether protest can still be considered an “unconventional,” or even violent or “confrontational” activity. Various forms of political protest have become, to an increasing degree, part of the consolidated repertoire of collective action, at least in Western democracies. In general, protest seems no longer restricted to radical sectors, but rather, an option open to a much broader range of actors when they feel their relative position in the political process to come under threat (Dalton 2008; McCarthy, Rafail, and Gromis 2013).

At the same time, however, public protest still differentiates social movements from other types of networks like those referred to as ‘epistemic communities’ (Haas 1992, 2015; Keck and Sikkink 1998). These communities are organized around networks of individuals and groups with specific scientific and/or managerial competences in distinct policy areas. Like social movements, their members share a common frame of reference and take side on conflictual issues. The forms of structural ties and exchange of resources within those networks are however different from those that tend to characterize social movements. Epistemic communities involve actors usually endowed with decision-making power and certified knowledge, as well as, often, electoral accountability. Instead, social movement actors usually occupy a peripheral

position in decision-making processes, and need to mobilize public opinion to maintain their pressure capacity. Even if some forms of protest are “normalized,” social movements tend to invent new disruptive forms of action—challenging the state on issues of law and order. It is true that, thanks to new communication technologies, forms of protest online have developed alongside more conventional ones, as illustrated by mail bombings or anonymous hackers entering protected sites of government or corporations (Coleman 2013; McDonald 2015). However, as the waves of collective mobilization at the turn of the century and from 2011 have confirmed, social movement politics is still to a significant extent “politics in the streets” (Gerbaudo 2012; della Porta and Mattoni 2014). The use of protest as a major source of pressure power has relevant effects on the structure and strategy of social movements.

1.3 IN THIS BOOK

In this chapter we identified four broad questions that have recurrently attracted the attention of analysts of social movements since the 1960s. These refer to how changes in the social structure in Western countries, most specifically the passage from an industrial to a post-industrial mode of social organization, might affect the forms of collective action (section 1.1.1); how cultural and symbolic production by social actors enables the identification of social problems as worthy objects of collective action and the construction of collective identity (section 1.1.2); how organizational and individual resources make collective action not only possible but also successful, at least potentially (section 1.1.3); how the forms of action adopted by social movements, their developments over time, and their clustering in broader waves of contention are all affected by the traits of the political and social systems in which social movements operate (section 1.1.4).

For each of these questions we have also identified some of the most influential answers provided by social movement scholars over the years. This has enabled us to introduce, if briefly, the main approaches that have characterized the field in the last decades: most particularly, if not exclusively, the new social movements, the collective behavior, the resource mobilization, and the political process approach. While none of these perspectives can be reduced to just one of the questions we identified, they all speak more neatly to one of such questions. The new social movements perspective can be regarded first and foremost as a theory of how the stakes and the central actors of social conflict are modified under changing structural conditions; the collective behavior approach mainly theorizes the role of symbolic production in shaping collective action and the conditions for the emergence of new issues and/or identities; resource mobilization theory explored the conditions leading to the emergence of collective action among people who might have more than one good reason not to engage in it; finally, the political process approach looks at the forms of collective action and their variation across different political regimes and different points in time.

In the second part of the chapter, we have showed how social movements may be regarded as distinctive social and political processes. In particular, we have identified

their distinctiveness in their consisting of informal networks, linking individual and organizational actors engaged in conflictual relations to other actors, on the basis of a shared collective identity (section 1.2.1). This has enabled us to differentiate social movements from a number of other related processes and phenomena. These include collective actions oriented to non-conflictual goals, e.g. in the field of charity work (section 1.2.2); the differences between movements and coalitions, mobilizing on specific issues or events (section 1.2.3); the relationship between political organizations such as parties and traditional interest groups and social movement processes (section 1.2.4); and the role of protest in contemporary movements (section 1.2.5).

As we have repeatedly argued, the questions we have identified are neither restricted to nor specific of social movement analysis, and can be of interest to a much broader spectrum of social and political analysts. At the same time, they are surely central to social movement research as it has developed since the 1960s, hence our decision to organize the rest of the book around such questions. We start with a discussion of the structural bases of contemporary movements (Chapter 2). By this we refer, on the one hand, to the mechanisms by which new social groups and new interests take shape, while other groups and interests which previously held center stage see their relevance declining; and on the other, to the impact that structural changes such as first the growth and then the contraction of public welfare, and the expansion of higher education, have on forms of political participation and, in particular, on noninstitutional participation. The impact of globalization processes is particularly relevant to our discussion.

There follow two chapters dedicated to symbolic production. Chapter 3 shows how cultural elaboration facilitates the definition of social problems as the product of asymmetries of power and conflicts of interest, and the identification of their causes in social and political factors, which are subject to human intervention. In chapter 4, we show how the creation and reinforcement of symbols also represents the base for the development of feelings of identity and solidarity, without which collective action cannot take place.

A third important level of analysis consists of the organizational factors which allow both the production of meaning and the mobilization of resources necessary for action. We take into consideration both informal networking and the more structured component of the organizational dimension. Chapter 5 deals in particular with the analysis of individual participation. We look at the mechanisms behind individual decisions to become engaged in collective action and to sustain their commitment over time, but we also look at how individuals create, through their participation, several opportunities for the development of networks that keep social movements and oppositional milieus together. Chapter 6 concentrates on certain properties of movement organizations, discussing the factors – internal and external – which influence the adoption of certain organizational models, and the consequences that follow for mobilization. It draws in particular our attention to the difference between “organization” and more general principles of “organizing,” meaning by that the broader mechanisms through which social actors coordinate their behavior.

The fourth crucial dimension is the interaction between movements and the political system. Movements represent innovative, sometimes radical, elements both in the way in which the political system works, and in its very structure. The characteristics of the political system offer or deny essential opportunities for the development of collective action. It is, furthermore, in reference principally, if not exclusively, to the political system that it becomes possible to value the impact of protest movements and their consequences in the medium term. In Chapter 7, we reconstruct some of the properties of protest cycles which have marked the history of recent decades, and the repertoires of collective action that were formed within these. In Chapter 8, we present certain aspects of the relationship between the configurations of political opportunities and the development of mobilization. In Chapter 9 we discuss, finally, the problem of the effects of movements. While the center of our analysis is represented by political change, we try, however, to pay attention also to the impact of movements on the social and cultural spheres.