

What distinguishes successful social movement from unsuccessful ones

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Abstract. This article wants to explore the channels through which social forces gather together. The anti-awakening protesters of the 1920s had a great social impact through “anti-awakening” propaganda. In this era of increasingly scarce connections between individuals, the building and consolidation of identity will become a challenge. Construction and consolidation of identity, are common in the movement, conscious or not, to ensure solidarity.

Keywords: social movement; identity; consolidation; construction

1. Introduction

Since the inauguration of the current US administration, the right wing activist of the country, aiming to reclaim their ‘traditional value’ grew an increasing visibility on the street and public media. They may share very little in their demographics, their ethnicity, age, and education background vary; and the bond between individuals to empirical observation is sparse. Yet they acted in homogeneity - targeting at progressive social movements and ideas,(Harriot, 2022) e.g., abortion right, racial equality, stigmatize which with the title of ‘woke’- for the sustain of their political ideology (Romano, 2020).They hold an intimidating potent power, drawing me to question, “How was the power gathered?”

2. Social Movements

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The powerful backlash from right has its nature of modern social movement, that power accumulates from grievance of people, with synonym of which, “contention”. Sidney Tarrow, a prominent scholars specialized in comparative politics and social movements leads the trend of taking synthetic approach to discover the underlying pattern behind social theory. To the definition of Sidney Tarrow, Social Movements are collective challenges, (Tarrow, 2022) built on the contentious politics. Contention, according to Merriam Webster, meaning something stated or argued, is the cornerstone of sustaining the social group with common purpose to interact consistently with its opponents, (Tarrow, 2022). The fundamental property of movements, social solidarity, was a product of Organization and Identity construction, the first of which derives its influence mainly from repertoire, latter of which bases its perspective on the printing press and crystallization. This essay aims to turn away from the traditional approach of emphasizing the leadership of heroic individuals, regarding the trend of decentralization in social movement at contemporary age, yet to focus on finding the common nature underlying successful modern social movements- the overlaps of aim would not be the indicator but the quantity of social impact as a whole- in respect of Organization and Association, Constructing and Consolidating Identity.

Social Movements take place in form of revenge, direct actions, petition demonstration, and even social media hashtags today, which Sidney Tarrow name them as Repertoire. It is an indication of

parameter and depth a movement could mobilize and organize, conversely, repertoires' diverging character makes key difference to the outcome of movements: An organized workers appeal taking to street has a clear aim, and may unite larger amount of people than an aimless mob's uprising to burn down the tax office. Thereby, repertoire represents effectiveness of organization in this essay.

In general, the repertoire evolve through age from being parochial, segmented, and particular, to being cosmopolitan, modular, and autonomous. They may also passively adapt to the opponent, i.e., government, and stage of society. Taking Russia's 1905 revolution as example, one of its symbolic event incorporating non violent repertoire of demanding bread (Tilly, 2017), is Bloody Sunday. It was a peaceful march taken place in front of Winter Palace, led by a orthodox priest father Gapon, and aiming for a relieve in mortgage and redemption fund(Lynch, 2008). It occurred in adaption to contemporary Russian society, the segmented nature - farmers being led by a local priest- origins in both religiousness and limited ability of mobilization due to the peasant-predominated demographic of Russia; and its particularity in issue was on account of the redemption fund specifically burdening the community of former serfs. The movement per se was regarded as a failure as it was suppressed by Nicholas II and failed to mobilize for another gathering, for that the repertoire was weak and primitive, embedded with particularity and segmentation. Much difference are found comparing it to the suffragette movement in United States and United Kingdoms. The movement was initiated at 1860s, signaled by the establishment of Harriet Mill's woman suffrage committee, and pinnaced at 1900s, eventually accomplishing their common pursuit of winning over full franchise for female voters (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023), hunger strikes, speeches are conducted consciously to enroll more members. Activists exceeds locality, spreading the movement throughout the Commonwealth and the United States, incorporating printing press and novel means of communication, i.e., telegraph; the repertoires evolved above direct actions aiming at the monarch or governor, into a more cosmopolitan form, i.e., speech, committee activity, with generalized aim to raise attention of opponent; they grew increasingly modular, thus replica could occur in homogeneity regardless of personnel, location, or time. The hunger strike performed by Madame Wallace-Dunlop at Holloway prison was adopted also by Mr Franklin at Pentonville Prison, expressing the common defiance to arrest for Pro-Suffragette activity(Beverly, 2023). With the contrasting outcome from female suffrage movement and 1905 Russia Revolution, we could see that movements with more modernized repertoire are prone to overall strong social impact, and vice versa.

Tarrow embraced the idea Benedict Anderson raised in *Imagined Communities*, that printing press created an collective identity(Anderson, 2016), and regard which as the basis of social movements(Tarrow, 2022). With the development of education and printing press, information were free to diffuse with leaflets and literatures, incorporated together with modular collective actions with cosmopolitan qualities, the movements are more likely to enlarge their parameter of influence, and interaction with authority. The Indochinese Communist Party(ICP), as the leading organization of communist revolution in Vietnam, utilized multiple forms of printing press in its propaganda campaign. Yet due to the illegitimate status of their printing, the methods are constrained at very primitive ones, i.e., in privation of ink and paper, as the legally registered factories under French Colonial rule refused to contract with them(McHale, 2010), the distribution of ICP's newspaper was also limited in peripheries, one of its major papers, *Mo Than*, was only read in a coalition of coal miner's in Tonkin. With very limited and primitive printing presses, the Nghe Tinh uprisings was doubted on the conduction of revolutionary messages, as it failed to create a community of propaganda audiences with great scale. The successor of ICP, Viet Minh, refined its form of publication to a more accessible and relevant way, to reach the barely-literate peasantries, they summarized the propaganda into short and repetitive slogans comprising more nationalism than communism ideology, such as "independence Vietnam"; to resonate with an audience group from more diverse social class, the messages in propagandas are targeted to portray and emphasize specific group of people, e.g., soldiers serving the French army(McHale, 2010). Having evoked the interest of a vast group of audience especially in the north, Viet Minh proved that creating a community of readers through printing press, serves the consolidation of unity for further actions.

Apart from the reader's communities, a mixture of traditional and modern themes, which was named after Bricolage by Tarrow, was also projected by the process of Vietnamese communist revolution (Tarrow, 2022). The concept of bricolage could be compared to the action of bridging, that connect the relic of the past to a idea of novelty. In the context of Vietnam, the embedded traditional ideologies were Buddhism and Confucianism, enhanced during the occupation of the Ming Dynasty (McHale, 2020), and had remained in influence after the French took over the throne; whilst Communism expresses novel teaching, introduced by the Vietnamese elite once resided in France and the western world. In the beginning, the communist cadres attempted to propagandize to the audience of peasantries with the French or Russian originated terminologies, e.g., class struggle (dau tranh giai cap) (McHale, 2020), which the Confucianist-minded peasants are in complete unfamiliarity with, and eventually resulted in complaints moaning the abstruse nature of wordings in propaganda. In the end, the ICP was unable to teach communist ideas to the mass public, with their uprising in 1931 arguably accounted by the grievance targeting tax collection (McHale, 2020). Whereas Viet Minh, in 1940s, took a more localized and indigenized approach to expand their prospective audiences, the notion of social class for example, was adapted to the tu dan, the existing hierarchal system in Confucianism tradition. As a fraction of identity forming, It is essentially an appropriation of the orthodox marxist ideology to evoke those symbols rooted in tradition that Vietnamese are familiar to, and forge the Vietnamese identity to a revolutionary one longing for movement and independence (McHale, 2020). Despite the backfires that many localized Viet Minh branches are unclear of the purpose, the strategy of indigenizing language in propaganda- a form of bricolage, explained the success of Viet Minh in late 1940s.

Viewing the construction of identity as a whole, it is less likely to be the direct cause of a collective action, yet a borderline drawn between actors in a movement (Tarrow, 2022), between the dissidents and authority, between conservative and progressive, and etc.. With the fact that identities on individuals are pluralized to their birth, education, and belief, (e.g., the Antifa protesters has more identities than belonging to the organizations, as any individual of them may believe in different religious belief or simultaneously recognize themselves as LGBTQ+), maintaining consistent Solidarity appeared to be a challenge. Construction and Consolidation of identities, are common in movements, consciously or not, to assure Solidarity. They are in opposing direction to multiple identities, to suppress the identities other than their goal of action. The symbolic word LGBTQ group has been taken for years, 'Queers', to represent themselves is an example of Construction and Consolidation. Starting off as a derogatory noun specifically to homosexual groups (Clarke, 2021), equal right activists reclaimed the word in 1980s circa as the symbol of their community, which constructed a sense of collective identity. In practice, individual's identity other than gender identities were diminished in sight in institutionalized associations, e.g., NGOs. Taking the Beijing LGBT Center as a case study, the center, in its publications highlighted the gender identity symbol, 'queer', and all the seminars were set on the agenda relevant to sexuality, whereas other identities were barely mentioned throughout. Through Construction and Consolidation of the identities, The center created an contiguous community with considerable social impact, with over 13000 people attending their seminar in the year of 2022 (Beijing LGBT Center, 2023). Although targeting it's alleged enemies instead of participant, the militia, Khmer Rouge made use of Construction and Consolidation as well. In this context, the city dwellers and monks are deprived of other of their original identity yet categorized in a unified identity as economic saboteur (Jackson, 2014). Khmer Rouge accomplished their goal despite brutality, with purging over 1.5 million of population mostly considered undesirable by the genocidal regime. Another failed revolution attempt occurred in 2011, the Greater Chinese Democratic Jasmine Revolution, was initiated with the inspiration from the Jasmine Revolution in Egypt and Tunisia, aiming at democratic reform and the eventual step-down of the Communist Party of China. The call originated from an anonymous twitter user and attenders were advised to wear a bloom of Jasmine to identify themselves. In the end the movement was cracked down by the authority without official response- as the polity of China remained authoritarian (Swartz, 2011). Contrasting from the internal, existing identities as sexuality or education background, the

Middle-East originated symbol, Jasmine, was unable to resonate with the embedded identities of participants, thus was vulnerable to any means of oppression, and, failed to construct Solidarity. Putting the nuances of listed movements in parallel, it is crystal clear that a powerful, lasting identity contributes to the social impact of a movement with a stronger connection between individual participants.

3. Conclusion

Anti-Woke protesters of 2020s, exerted enormous social impact with ‘anti-woke’ propaganda. Recently, they were proved to be decisive in financial market through a successful boycott campaign against the inclusive marketing of Bud-Light beer. Eventually, their sphere of influence radiated to challenge the decision of legislature, to fulfill their belief in form of legal articles, e.g., the book ban in the state of Florida (Bethea, 2023). The repertoire they put in practice may be an evolved version of those in the past, yet possesses similar quality: online hashtag protest on social media are only the modern parallel of Dazibao. Yet Construction and Consolidation of identities, in the age where ties between individual grew more sparsely, will become a challenge. Movements that managed tackle the challenge stand out as the successful ones.

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