The relational basis of social movement identities: Re-assessing the ‘newness’ of new social movements*

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For Alberto Melucci, the new social movements (hencefoth, NSMs) of the 1970s and 1980s were both a blessing and a curse. If his writings on those subjects made him an internationally acclaimed scholar, they also provided a label for his work, which he grew increasingly uncomfortable with over the years. He was particularly unhappy with both opponents and uncritical advocates of NSM theory relying on a misleading view of movements as unified objects, which specific empirical properties should be attached to (Melucci, 1996: 78-9; see also 1994, 1995). In his opinion, both advocates and critics had failed to treat novelty as a relative concept, a heuristic tool that analysts had adopted at a specific time to emphasize the peculiarity of emerging forms of collective action by comparison to working class action (Melucci, 1995: 109).

Current uses of the NSM tag clearly demonstrate that Melucci's – and before him, Touraine's – call for an analytical, rather than empiricist, view of social movements has mostly fallen on deaf ears. While many of the key claims by theorists of "new" social movements - and indeed new politics within political science (e.g. Dalton 1988; Inglegart 1990) - are now conventional social science wisdom, the core question of the approach (what is new?) has hardly been addressed properly. Discussion has been balkanised along several different strands, with critics questioning the newness of NSMs' repertoires (Tarrow, 1994; Koopmans, 1995), emphasising the role of identity in previous movements (Calhoun, 1993), stressing the persistent role of material issues and concerns in contemporary 'new' movements (Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992; Martin, 1998), claiming the persistent relevance of the class paradigm (Heath et al., 1991), sometimes even denying any relevance whatsoever to new politics and new social movements theories (Jordan and Maloney, 1997).

The fragmentation of the discussion is at least partially due to discussions of the newness of NSMs having developed without hardly any attention to the concept of social movement, i.e., to the distinctive characteristics of the social process, the novelty of which is being assessed. My – admittedly unfashionable – proposal of reconsidering the newness of NSMs starts precisely from the trivial postulate that, in order to properly assess the novelty of a phenomenon, we need first of all to identify its analytical components. In this paper, I'll discuss the novelty of social movements in the light of a view of movements as informal networks of actors (organizations, groups, and individuals) engaged in conflicts for the control of material or symbolic stakes, on the basis of shared identities (Diani, 1992a: 13). Although Melucci dismissed this definition as "empiricist" (1996: 29), his approach is crucial in drawing analysts' attention to the constructed nature of these networks, and of the identities upon which they are based. The only - albeit substantial - point of disagreement is that I am not persuaded by his view of movements' organisational forms as largely dependent on the systemic properties of the conflicts. In particular, I find Melucci's contrast between network forms of organisation, peculiar of new movements, and more political, bureaucratic ones, typical of industrial society, problematic (Fantasia, 1989; Calhoun, 1993; Tarrow, 1994). I'd rather regard multipolar networks as a distinctive trait of any social movement, at least in analytical terms- even though their specific empirical configurations may vary substantially.

Treating movements as networks offers, I think, distinct analytical advantages over approaches which reduce movements to the conflicts on which they mobilize, to specific types of organizations, or to aggregates of not necessarily connected protest events

(Diani, 1992a, 1995, 2003). If social movements are best conceived as peculiar form of network organization, then any assessment of the newness of recent movements should take network factors systematically into account. The core question would then become: has the emergence of NSMs reflected and - in turn - stimulated a change in the form and properties of social movement networks?

I suggest we address this question in the light of the patterns of social relations that social movements generate through the overlapping memberships and personal linkages of their activists, and through the alliances between the different groups which identify with the a given cause. To this purpose I draw upon two classical concepts, Stein Rokkan's "political cleavage" and Georg Simmel's "intersection of social circles", which are rarely related explicitly to each other (but see Linz, 1967). Rokkan's work proides the link between the structural bases of conflict and social networks; Simmel's idea of the intersection of social circles[1] enables us to grasp the individualization process, but also to look at how memberships may re-combine in different structural patterns. In drawing upon Rokkan and Simmel I adopt a highly selective, instrumental approach. I borrow some key ideas from those writers, without claiming to provide a global account, nor an original interpretation, of their work. I rather try to show how an unusual integration of two classics may improve our understanding of a specific contemporary process.

2. Social movements and social cleavages

Not all social movements develop across establisehd political cleavages: they are often generated within a specific social milieu, that movement activista and organizations try to revitalize or redefine. One could easily read the Italian New Left of the late 1960s-early 1970s along those lines (see e.g. Diani, 1996). Other times, however, movement networks explicitly cut across existing cleavages. As the network dimension of cleavages is not often recognized as it should these days, it is worth recalling briefly Rokkan's main tenets. For Rokkan, individuals participating in politics are embedded in both primary and secondary networks which shape their attitudes, provide incentives and opportunities for political involvement, filter mobilizing messages from the political elites. Crucially, the role of networks in strengthening political identities and loyalties is not restricted to political socialization, but persists over the individual life cycle. It also persists during the phase of consolidation of contemporary democratic polities.

The implications of this argument go beyond the mere notion that individual conduct is shaped by social networks. Rather, group and associational memberships combine along recurrent patterns over time. These patterns are in turn the result of the choices made by key political actors at critical junctures in the process of political change. Depending on the evolution of conflicts between centre and periphery, state and church, workers and employers, and landed and industrial interests, not only different political identities but different sets of political organizations developed (1970: 79-112). Not only that: these organizations had a crucial role in securing the persistence of cleavages, strengthening citizens' identification with specific political projects, thereby encapsulating European electorates within political subcultures and reducing electoral mobility (1970: 101-44;

[1] See also Breiger's (1988) operationalization.

see also Panebianco, 1982: 19). Encapsulation was based on membership in both associations and primary groups such as the family or the peer group.

Rokkan describes how social movements, who had posed a challenge to pre-existing power configurations, not only gradually increased their status as recognized members of their polities but, by doing so, determined the emergence of radically different political systems, and of new social formations consisting of both associational and direct, interpersonal linkages. The network-organizational side of cleavages is not always at the core of current interpretations of NSMs and new politics. Many influential analysts of new politics have actually tended to collapse cleavages and individual political attitudes and behaviour. In this perspective, a cleavage persists to the extent that people keep supporting in the elections parties which are traditionally associated with that cleavage, and/or identifying with their values and world views; conversely, changes in people's values and their increasing support for recently constituted parties which do not share in any established political identity will be regarded as a proof of weakening cleavages (Inglehart, 1990; Dalton, 1988).

Focusing on individual opinions and behaviors, however, tells us little about the organizational processes which lurk behind them, and which can actually affect the capacity of existing identities to adapt to new ideas and incorporating them. Nor does it illustrate how new ideas may consolidate into more persistent organizational arrangements. Bartolini and Mair (1990) have drawn our attention again to the organizational side of cleavages. Although they focus on electoral behaviour, their argument may well be extended to other forms of participation. If political identities are to keep their salience, and therefore their capacity to shape political participation, this depends on several factors, including, along with social homogeneity and cultural distinctiveness, organizational density (1990: 224-5).

Therefore, Rokkan helps us to identify a different criterion to assess the novelty of social movements in contemporary societies. We should assess the novelty of social movements' challenges to dominant actors in their polities in the light of their capacity to develop and consolidate new, distinct organizational and primary linkages. Rather than "Are citizens conceiving of political life/behaving politically in a different way than in the past and therefore organizing in/supporting new types of movements?", we should first of all ask "Have NSMs generated forms of organizational and/or communitarian relationships, which have weakened the organizational and relational bases of dominant cleavages?" The next crucial question should then be: have NSMs the potential to generate new types of social encapsulation? Or should we regard NSMs as evidence of the fact that the passage from industrial to post-industrial society eradicates the very conditions on which the concept of cleavage was based - and therefore conclude that any extension of Rokkan's concepts to post-industrial politics would be inappropriate?

Scholars have started looking at how different types of memberships combine and relate to each other (e.g. Kriesi, 1993). This concern was also explicit in Rokkan's work - for example when he drew attention on "the conditions for given types of ties-in between party political activities and participation in other policy-influencing groups, collectivities and organizations" (1970: 30). (Again, although his focus there was on the relationships between political and economic elites, the argument may be easily extended to participation at large). If we adopt this perspective, the core question is no

longer if new organizations emerged at all, but if different types of participation - in particular, individuals' multiple allegiances to parties, churches, associations, unions, community groups, etc. - managed to combine across the opposite poles of an established cleavage, and by doing so, to generate new clusters of social relations. It is at this point that Simmel's analysis of the relational dimension of social life becomes useful and important.

3. The relational bases of movement identities

In "The Web of Group Affiliations" (1955), Simmel starts off with an analogy between the formation of individual personality and the emergence of social structure, as both consist of the development of representations of reality which go beyond what is immediately experienced by the subject. In both cases, it is a matter of growing differentiation between what is immediately perceivable/available and what is identified as relevant following more careful choice/selection of the objects of relevance to the actor. "To the primitive mind any accidental coexistence of objects in time and space is psychologically sufficient to lead to a connection between ideas... But [upon examination it appears that] each composite attribute is closely connected with other attributes which together make up that specific environmental context in which one has come to know them.... thus, the association of ideas is no longer a simple response to what is actually perceived. Instead, it becomes grounded in the content of what is perceived, and more complex concepts are developed upon this basis...... The development which takes place among ideas finds an analogue in the relationship of individuals to each other", (1955: 127).

For individuals, the process consists of their increasing awareness of the existence of a reality beyond unchosen family ties; for groups, the analogy consists of the passage from forms of sociation based on similarity and/or proximity to forms based on free choice. For example, Simmel notes how in modern society "the trade had become the governing principle of the workers' organizations in place of the city .... membership in a trade union implies more freedom of choice for the individual than belonging to the citizenry of a town" (129).[2] Likewise, the move from middle ages to renaissance brings about a shift from groups based on "natural, immediately given criteria" (1955: 135) to groups bringing together like-minded people who share interest in something while still radically differing in other aspects: "humanistic interests broke down the medieval isolation of social groups and of estates..... a common interest in ideas and in

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[2] Like all dichotomous views of the transition from pre-modern to modern society, even this particular interpretation - in itself non peculiar to Simmel - could be found wanting on historical grounds. For example, Gould's (1995) analysis of social conflict in 19th century Paris suggests that while trade was crucial in the definition of identities in 1848, locality (i.e., residence in specific *arrondissements*) was the dominant source of identity in the Commune. Simmel's distinction is however important in analytical terms, as the following sections will show.

knowledge....cut across all previously established forms and institutions of medieval life" (pp. 135-6).

What is crucial here is not the passage from single, family-based memberships to multiple ones, but the relationship which develops between the different memberships. Multiple memberships were already present in the middle ages, yet they were self-contained: one dominant membership in a key group determined all the others and made it very difficult to exert freedom of choice on this ground. "These patterns [of group affiliation] had the peculiarity of treating the individual as a member of a group rather than as an individual, and of incorporating him thereby in other groups as well....", (1955: 139). What Simmel calls "concentric circles" "..... do not allot any special position to the person who participates in them, because participation in the smallest of these groups already implies participation in the larger groups" (1955: 147).

Concentric ties are typical of medieval society. In contrast, the move to modernity - which Simmel associates with humanism (1955: 135-6) - sees the emergence of the idea of voluntary association, where membership stems out of choice. Accordingly, intersecting rather than concentric circles prevail (1955: 132), where memberships combine in different ways in different individuals. This entails richer and more diversified personalities, and greater individualization: "The larger the number of groups to which an individual belongs, the more improbable is it that other persons will exhibit the same combination of group-affiliations" (1955: 140). At the same time, though, this also generates tensions within one's personality between competing affiliations and loyalties: "The security and lack of ambiguity in [the individual's] former position gives way to uncertainty in the conditions of his life.... (1955: 141) ... different aspects of the individual can be subsumed under different codes of honor which reflect the different groups to which the person belongs simultaneously" (1955: 164). For all the differences, the tension between different codes of honor highlighted by Simmel bears more than one passing analogy to contemporary tensions between conflicting identities (Calhoun, 1994; Somers, 1994; Melucci, 1996). Similarly to collective identities, codes of honor entail moral expectations and obligations: "The extent to which associations [based on interest] also form a tightly-knit group may be gauged on the basis of whether and to what extent such a group has developed a special code of 'honor'. Such a code would imply that every member of the group would feel that his honor was diminished whenever any member suffered an insult or a deprivation of his honor. In this sense the association possesses a collective sense of honor...", (1995: 163).

The main strength of Simmel's model lies probably in its capacity to recognize the dual nature of social memberships (Breiger, 1988): individuals differentiate their personality through multiple group memberships; at the same time, groups are distinctive in that they result from the convergence of specific individuals, but are also connected to each other by the fact of sharing some of their members. Simmel's emphasis on the form, rather than the specific content, of social processes facilitates the application of his concepts to historical periods other than the ones which provided most of his empirical examples. In particular, although mainly illustrated with references to the transition from medieval, pre-modern society to modern society, Simmel's notion of the duality between persons and groups offers many insights to contemporary social movement analysts.

The relation between individuals and groups/organizations in social movements has attracted wide attention recently (Melucci, 1996; Rupp and Taylor, 1987; Whittier, 1995). By referring to Simmel's concepts we may locate the idea of movement participation as involvement in multiple groups and organizations, both political and subcultural, within a specific analytical framework. Attention for overlapping memberships represents a criterion to systematically assess the structure of specific movements (Diani, 1995; Osa, 2003) as well as broader movement sectors (Carroll and Ratner, 1996). We can also interpret in this light the tension between exclusive and inclusive forms of organization. When participation in radical collective action is channeled through the former - be they political organizations inspired by the Leninist model, religious sects, or secluded communes - concentric patterns of relationships are likely to prevail. Activists will tend to draw their acquaintances from milieus directly connected to the core group they belong to. Memberships in world-rejecting sects like Hare Krishna entails for example a drastic re-organization of individual relationships, with virtually all meaningful social relations developing within the group (Snow, Eckland, and Zurcher, 1980; Diani, 1986). By contrast, inclusive styles of participation allow for multiple group memberships, the terms of each being the subject of explicit negotiation. The crisis of the radical left-wing organizations close to the Leninist model in Italy in the late 1970s, and the move towards multiple forms of partial commitments like in women's self-consciousness groups, environmental local groups, human rights organizations, etc., provides an example of how broader changes in collective action patterns may be captured by a relational perspective emphasizing the shift from concentric to intersecting circles Melucci, 1984a; Diani, 1992b).

Contemporary social movement analysis is therefore imbued with Simmelian themes and perspectives, if mostly unrecognized. Let us then see how the concept of the intersection of social circles relates to the concept of cleavage, and how our understanding of the latter can benefit from taking the former into account.

4. Cleavages as concentric networks

Modern political cleavages can actually be seen as a peculiar type of concentric circles. In their attempt to secure electors' loyalty, political parties have, according to Rokkan, attempted to strengthen the barriers between their own social milieu and their environment. Albeit with substantial differences across time and space,[3] they have tried to develop specific subcultures,[4] in order to reduce the threats posed by their competitors over their core electoral base. Religious parties represent a straightforward example of this effort. After the introduction of manhood suffrage, parties acting on behalf of religious interests turn into mass organizations and build exclusive organizational

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[3] For example the agrarian-urban cleavage in Germany in the late nineteenth century was not based on strong subcultural processes and identities (Lebovics, 1967).

[4] I define a subculture a social group defined "along ethnic, regional, class, occupation, and other lines .... [and which] becomes meaningful insofar as it is expressive of a network of social relationships" (Yinger, 1982: 41).

infrastructures, consisting of a myriad of parallel associations and agencies, in order to preserve their support from external influences (Rokkan, 1970: 103). The pillarization of the Dutch political system and society, with vertical forms of integration based on religious (or non religious) allegiances is probably the best known example of this process (Rokkan, 1970: 104-106). The lower or higher level of system segmentation affects the characteristics of the political process as a whole: "In a highly *ontzuild* system [i.e., in a system with low segmentation and high criss-crossing of multiple memberships] there is low membership crystallization; most of the participants tend to be tied to organizations and environments exposing them to divergent political pressures. By contrast in a highly *verzuild* [i.e., segmented] system there is high membership crystallization; most of the participants tend to be exposed to messages and persuasive efforts in the same direction in all their 24-hour, 7-day environments" (Rokkan, 1970: 105).

Although it is usually regarded as less segmented than the Netherlands (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 227), Italy provides another illustration of Rokkan's argument. Identification with the dominant Catholic, Communist and Socialist parties in the postwar democracy at the same time generated, and was reinforced by, involvement in a broder range of political and social organizations. These ranged from trade unions, with CGIL-Italian Labor General Confederation close to the Communists and Socialists and CISL-Italian Confederation of Labor Unions organizing workers with Christian-Democrat allegiancies, to leisure time and sport clubs, among them left-wing ARCI-Italian Cultural and Recreational Association and Catholic Libertas (Poggi, 1968). The pivotal role of partisan memberships in shaping most associational affiliations, and also extending into personal friendship and family networks, bears more than an occasional resemblance to the process described by Simmel when he notes how membership in a core organization also entail a whole range of other, related affiliations. Political subcultures are concentric circles in their purest form.

Concentric patterns of social relations delimit the practical opportunities of social exchange - to the extent that people involved are predominantly connected to alters within the same milieu. They also, and most importantly, shape people's identities and social representations. Identities are embedded in "circles of recognition", which consist of both concrete social relationships and virtual circles of ideas (Pizzorno, 1991; see also Somers, 1994; Emirbayer, 1997: 296-7). The interdependence between ideas and concrete relationships shapes dramatically possible courses of action: some appear as obvious and accessible, while others seem to be unfeasible if not unconceivable.[5]

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[5]It has long been noticed that a fundamental dimension of political action (both institutional and non institutional) has to do with boundary definition, with the struggle to define what is a legitimate political issue and what is not, what political identities should be regarded as legitimate and what should not. The range of possible references is enormous as it goes from agenda-setting theory to Foucauldian theories of power. Melucci (1996) still offers the most powerful application

Likewise, Rokkan's cleavages are based on networks with both an instrumental and a cognitive component. Consistently with Simmel's argument about the relationship between social ties and cognition, the social linkages which reinforce partisan identification - and therefore provide the basis for the reproduction of cleavages - can also be regarded as sources of meaning. They allow actors to locate themselves in the broader social world, to articulate their own interests and values, to identify their friends and foes, potential allies and irreducible opponents. These mechanisms operate at their best when membership in social groups concentrates within specific circles, consisting of overlapping primary and secondary groups, associational and private - often, family - ties. When we have, in other words, concentric circles. These circles support cleavages to the extent that they reinforce actors' worldviews and solidarities while reducing the possibility of their accessing other social milieus with conflicting views. It follows that a cleavage ".... is a process which leads to the definition of some forms and modalities of conflict as legitimate, and to the exclusion of other as illegitimate" (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 2).

But what happens when the strength of social linkages at the basis of political cleavages weakens, and the latter start losing their salience, i.e., their capacity to shape political conflict and identities? Political sociologists in the 1960s looked at this process mainly from the perspective of democratic consolidation and the weakening of the potential for radical conflict, embedded in salient, highly polarized cleavages. This approach shapes for example Rokkan's well-known argument about the highest potential for conflict in societies where different lines of segmentation overlap in the same social groups (as, for example, did language, territory, and class in Belgium: Rokkan, 1970). This was also emphasized by one of the few analysts explicitly relating Simmel's concepts to political cleavages. In his comparison of the evolution of German and Italian democracies in the postwar period, Juan Linz stressed the importance of associational linkages cutting across the traditional political subcultures for the deradicalization of new, still consolidating democracies (Linz, 1967: 313-6).

In this perspective, the move from concentric to crosscutting circles is basically a signal of the weakening of established, enduring identities and, therefore, of the solidarities and hostilities attached to them. It is a proof of growing individualization in contemporary societies, which reduces potential tensions through multiplication of group memberships. However, one could note that opportunities for political change - rather than mere deradicalization - may also increase when the concentric nature of patterns of social relations weakens. Simmel argues for example that the 1707 union between England and Scotland was made possible only because religious and political-territorial identities separated. This facilitated a merger driven by commonalties of practical interests between English and Lowland Scottish emerging economic elites (Simmel, 1955: 160). But rather than eliminating opportunities for conflict tout court, this shift generated potential for new conflicts.

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of this argument to social movement analysis (see also Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994: 1440, and Tilly, 1995, with explicit reference to Rokkan).

We can take a similar approach to contemporary conflicts and ask whether the launching of bridges and the development of memberships across established cleavage lines could not also reflect the development of new types of collective solidarities, and therefore of potentially new cleavages (as suggested, albeit not within an explicitly Simmelian framework, by Kriesi, 1993; Kriesi et al., 1995). The growth of intersecting circles surely testifies to the reduced capacity of traditional political subcultures to encapsulate citizens: but does that necessarily mean the move towards purely individualistic societies? After all, the notion of concentric and intersecting is a relative one, and we might ask ourselves, "concentric - or intersecting - with respect to what?"

We are now in the position to reformulate the problem of the novelty of social movements. If these are primarily networks of informal groups, semi-formal and formal organizations, and individuals (Diani, 1992a), the question becomes in which broader social context do these linkages - based on alliances and exchanges of other resources between organisations, as well as on individuals' multiple memberships or personal friendships - develop? Are they confined within the boundaries of already existing cleavages and subcultures? Or do they develop systematically across them?

There is no general answer to this question. Some movements share the identities behind certain cleavages but rather question the adequacy - sometimes, even the legitimacy - of the organizations which are dominant within a given subculture. In such cases, new organizations may develop, challenging the leadership of more established ones, and trying to achieve some recognition and standing in a specific political milieu. Collective actions of this type are unlikely to attract support and militancy across the boundaries of traditional cleavages. Far more plausibly, they will try do divert support away from established organizations within a given subculture, by offering a political alternative. In structural terms, the newness of these movements will be limited. They will not aim at breaking dominant political identities and solidarities, but rather at revitalizing existing ones, possibly through the incorporation of new organizations in the political arena (Diani, 1996). By this token, many of the radical workers' organizations that challenged established left-wing parties and unions between the 1960s and 1970s should not be regarded as new. They may have adopted unusual and/or more radical tactics and looser, more participatory organizational forms, but their action was largely embedded within the existing left-right cleavage. New organizations may well have emerged, but the global configuration of the polity was not necessarily affected.[6]

Other movements, however, mobilize networks of people and groups which cut across traditional cleavages. They may be seen as attempts to break concentric circles, and replace them with intersecting ones. They challenge cleavages both as sources of meaning and as specific relational structures. In their attempts to nominate the world (Melucci, 1996), social movements attack the peculiar balance of ties and

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[6] Bartolini and Mair (1990) make a similar argument when they stress that the emergence of new parties and the shifting electoral fortunes within a given political area are not tantamount to a change of the cleavage structure.

representations, embedded in established cleavages. Not only frames do change, but frames and social relations. Actors' perceptions of the social space are modified accordingly: not all previous "friends" are still so; former "enemies" are now regarded as possible allies and/or friends. The most important aspect of the process is not the creation of new concrete ties as such, but the development of social representations which allow to locate both new and pre-existing ties in different relational settings.[7] If identity building implies the development of connections (Pizzorno, 1991), then the rise of social movements and related identities may also bring about changes in connections, which at times cut across established cleavages.

Examples of these process are far from rare in recent years. Women's movements have developed ties (around issues like domestic violence or equal opportunities) which could not be contained within the boundaries of any specific subculture, or reduced to any specific position on a traditional cleavage. Environmental movements have brought about a comparable reshuffling: new alliances have developed as conservative environmentalists have often joined forces with progressive ones; at the same time, old alliances have crumbled, as e.g. hunters associations have clashed with environmentalist groups sharing the same position on the left-right cleavage.

Attempts to develop intersecting circles may also be found in the experience of movements which are well embedded in established cleavages. In Italy in the 1970s, the growth of the trade unions and the traditional left also resulted in the weakening of the religious cleavage, as people actively involved with the Church increasingly disclosed their simultaneous commitment to left-wing, non confessional organizations (Tarrow, 1988). Although Catholics had always been involved in left wing organizations as individuals, in the 1970s this became more explicit. Participation across the traditional cleavages turned into a public fact, instead of being relegated to the private sphere. Organizations like Cristiani per il Socialismo (Christians for Socialism) were founded, which would have been inconceivable only a few years before.

The break of traditional boundaries was not restricted to ideas in any of the cases I just mentioned; it also brought about changes in patterns of relationships. Sometimes, like in the case of Catholics active in left-wing unions, ties were of an organizational type. Other time, bonds cutting across cleavages developed on the occasion of participation in specific public activities. Regardless of their specific organizational form, social movements often innovate with respect to existing cleavages. Through the creation of unusual, intersecting linkages, they try to start re-alignment processes within existing polities; at times they go as far as developing a global anti-systemic challenge (Diani, 1996).

5. Redefining 'new' and 'old' in social movements

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[7] As Somers (1994: 627) notes, "Social change [should not be conceived] as evolution or revolution from one societal type to another, but by shifting relationships among the institutional arrangements and cultural practices that constitute one or more social settings."

We should not read the argument presented in the previous section as an attempt to argue for the newness of those empirical phenomena, conventionally defined as NSMs, on a different, and hopefully more solid ground. Although I have mostly illustrated attempts to crosscut traditional cleavages with examples mostly from movements conventionally referred to as NSMs, the same processes may be found among more traditional movements like working class or ethnoterritorial ones. Here we have an analytical principle which may guide our analysis of what is new in a whole range of social and political movements, regardless of whether they fall under the NSMs empirical label. From a relational perspective, social movements in contemporary Western societies can be regarded as new to the extent that they draw upon, or generate new solidarities *and* group memberships which cut across the boundaries of any specific traditional political cleavage, and thus undermine current forms of encapsulation. Accordingly, their impact will be stronger, the more new intersecting circles manage to consolidate over time (Diani, 1997).

In contrast, social movements are not new simply because of the issues they address, the opinions of their sympathizers, and/or the stakes of the conflicts in which they are protagonists. Nothing in principle prevents established political organizations from shaping and giving political voice to emerging interests and/or beliefs. Likewise, reducing movements to conflicts - more specifically, to their stakes - deprives movements of any specificity in as much as any conflict can be acted on by a huge variety of actors. Failing to recognize this distinction leads even the most sophisticated theorists to use collective action and movements interchangeably. Nor should the novelty of social movements be assessed in the light of their tactics or organizational forms. The former are rather a contingent response to the opportunities offered by the system in which movements operate, and to the need to adapt to their opponents' strategies (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994); the latter may be subject not only to changes in the environment (Kriesi, 1996; Rucht, 1996) but to normal organizational life-cycle processes (Diani and Donati, 1999).[8]

By combining insights from Rokkan and Simmel, we can identify a different research programme, which evaluates recent forms of collective action in the light of their structural properties. I am not sure whether Alberto Melucci would have approved of it. He would have probably questioned the meaningfulness of talking of cleavages in a context where growing individualization had dramatically reduced the odds for the development of new forms of social encapsulation and, hence, of new cleavages. Sadly, we have to leave this all to the domain of speculation. What I am sure of, though, is that my own – and indeed many others' – thinking on the relational elements of social movement identities would not have develpoed the way it has without Alberto's intellectual leadership. I am very grateful to the organizers of this meeting for giving me the opportunity to share these ideas with you.

As a first step, rather than focusing on individual properties, and/or on the characteristics of organizations, or on the stakes of conflicts, we should look at how different actors relate to each other in broader patterns of interaction. What are the

[8]See however Ennis (1987) for an interesting attempt to analyze the sharing of collective action repertoires as a particular type of social linkage between movement organizations.

backgrounds of people active in social movements? What are their past and current organizational memberships? What about their personal ties? And, moving to organizations: what are the alliance and opposition systems which they are part of? Are they connected to each other through their activists' overlapping memberships, and in which form?

Having identified patterns of ties among movement activists and organizations, we should then relate those patterns to existing cleavages. Do linkages among movement actors develop within traditional subcultures, however defined? Or are they more diversified? Questions of this kind should not be regarded as a way to measure the dissolution of existing cleavages only. If that was the standard, in most Western societies we would easily find ample signs of the novelty of recent movements and the dissolution of old cleavages. The most difficult part of the exercise is actually to go beyond that stage and identify patterns - if any - of recomposition. Are new cleavages emerging? Can we in other words identify regularities in patterns of ties which not only undermine old concentric circles, but seem to prefigure the consolidation of new ones? And, to which extent are the new subcultures exclusive? There is indeed strong evidence that participation in social movements does not develop in isolation; to the contrary, movement participation is a clustered process, characterized by multiple involvements (Kriesi, 1993, pp.184-8; McAdam and Paulsen, 1993; Diani, 1995).

As a final step we should then address the question of whether there is any chance for new types of cleavages to develop, along analogous lines to the ones described by Rokkan. Some examples of recent collective action suggest that this hypothesis might at least deserve more systematic exploration. Recent research on feminist movements has shown how social ties among feminist activists have been reproduced over time through involvement in specific subcultures, the boundaries and visibility of which could change dramatically under different conditions (Whittier, 1995). The growth of the Green movement in Germany since the 1970s has by no means be restricted to political organizations. To the contrary, activism in green and alternative initiatives has often been reinforced by involvement in specific social networks based on cultural, self-help, communitarian, "alternative economy" activities (Lyons, 1988; von Dirke, 1997). In Britain, dissent has often taken a cultural rather than an explicitly political form, through actitivities ranging from mass rave parties to the practice of alternative lifestyles, as reflected for example in the DIY (do it yourself) movement (McKay, 1966). In the Netherlands, activism in and sympathy for different types of NSMs have been shown to overlap to a large degree thus providing at least one of the necessary conditions for the emergence of a "new politics" cleavage (Kriesi, 1993, pp.184-8 and 240-4).

However, while collective identity does not stem from categorical traits, collective action is made easier by the combination of categorical and relational properties (Tilly, 1978; Somers, 1997). The dynamics Rokkan focused on did not merely create structural tensions which political entrepreneurs could mobilize: they also created the potential for the development of specific social networks which might sustain mobilization. For example, the advent of the Fordist assembly line in large factories and the homogenizing effect of national education and military service all contributed to the formation of the widespread networks upon which participation in national politics was based. Critics might reasonably claim that the crisis of both the nation state and traditional industry

might not only undermine existing cleavages,[9] but also herald the emergence of an individualized society in which even social conflict takes mostly individualized forms (Melucci, 1996; Donati, 1997).

We might address this issue by searching for structural processes which might contribute to the consolidation - if not to the creation - of ties and solidarities among people involved in NSM networks. One possible starting point would be re-examining some of the basic arguments of NSMs theory from a relational perspective. There are actually several structural processes which have been linked with the emergence of new politics, and which might at the same time provide the conditions for the development of different types of social networks.

The first process is the growth of *education* (Roootes, 1995): no matter the expansion of individualized, and often compouter-mediated, education, this is still an activity with a strong potential for ties building, and with a strong embeddedness in both local communities and translocal (regional and national) associations. It is indeed disputable whether education as such can be regarded as a predictor of collective action, even less so as a distinctive trait of activism in NSMs; what matters here, however, is that the education background of many NSMs activists can provide opportunities for interaction, and therefore strengthen mobilization and consolidate solidarities, when and where they have emerged. A related process is the growth of the service sector, in particular, of the *social welfare and cultural professions* (Kriesi, 1989). Despite the tendential fragmentation of the service sector, this is less pronounced for the activities which attract most NSM supporters. Social services and cultural activities are largely - if not exclusively - organized in the context of large scale public institutions and voluntary, non-profit organizations. These may provide the social embeddedness for the development of new subcultures and new solidarities. One should also take into account the persistence of the *urban space* as a locus of social relationship and solidarity, in particular as the arena where conflicts on collective consumption (Castells, 1983) develop. Citizens' location in the urban space and their differential access to collective goods and provisions (in particular, to public-generated ones) may still facilitate the emergence of specific identities and networks. Finally, one might want to consider the potential impact of *virtual media* and *communication technologies* on the emergence of new types of networking and solidarity building (Sirianni and Friedland, 1995; Calhoun, 1988).

None of these processes will automatically generate political identities and political networks. These are not necessary developments, and the very same processes might easily take very different directions. Still, one should not dismiss their potential impact on the consolidation of new political networks without further investigation. Looking at the uneven development of NSMs across Europe, and relating it to the distinctiveness of the social networks behind this process, would represent a creative application of Rokkan's perspective, rather than a mechanical applications of obsolete categories to an utterly different context.

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[9] See Pincon (1986) and Westergaard et al. (1988) on the impact of socio-economic change on class communities.

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