Social Movements and Global Social Change

The Rising Tide

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Chapter Ten

Aspiring Social Movements

Subjects, denizens, and citizens have rejected the social inequalities imposed on them by dynastic states and new republics, embraced the promise of liberty, equality, and solidarity, and organized social movements to change their circumstances. The upward thrust of aspiring social movements has propelled social change around the world during the past two hundred years. Aspiring movements created republics in postcolonial states, democratized the republics, and expanded citizenries within them. These developments reduced interstate violence and world war, curbed state violence against subject populations, and constrained violence by nonstate actors. Of course, aspiring movements were not wholly responsible for these developments. Altruistic and restrictionist movements also played important roles. But the struggles waged by aspiring individuals, social networks, organizations, and political parties drove global social change.

RISE OF THE REPUBLICS

Subjects in the colonies of dynastic states fought to create constitutional governments based on popular sovereignty in republican states. But they appealed to different kinds of social identities when they mobilized denizen and subject populations. For example, Sinn Fein and the Indian National Congress organized people along secular, ethnic lines.[1] By contrast, both the Zionist movement, which created a Jewish state in Palestine, and the Muslim League, which created a Muslim state in postcolonial India, organized along ethnic religious lines.[2] Meanwhile, socialist and communist parties in dynas-

tic states and their colonies and in the new republics appealed to secular, class-based identities. Still, whether they used status- or class-based identities to enlist recruits, aspiring movements all fought to establish republican forms of government: the Republic of Ireland; the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; the People's Republic of China.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE REPUBLICS

In many of the new republics, factions captured state power and established dictatorships, which undermined or destroyed popular sovereignty and reduced citizens to subjects of state authority. Eventually, aspiring movements overthrew many dictatorships and democratized the republics. Individual dissidents, such as Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, and members of social networks, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, challenged government authorities. Others fled singly or in groups from East Germany and by boat from Cuba and Vietnam to escape the state's jurisdiction and become denizens or citizens in more democratic republics. People gathered illegally in public squares—in Buenos Aires, Leipzig, Seoul, and Cairo—to demand change. In Poland, workers organized Solidarity, a dissident union, to challenge government authority and Soviet military occupation. In South Africa, the African National Congress waged strikes by workers and students to challenge apartheid. Although they were not everywhere successful and dictators remain entrenched in China, North Korea, and Iran, aspiring movements democratized perhaps forty republics during the past forty years.

In some places, secular and religious ethnonational movements fought not only to democratize the republics but also to divide power and create separate republics of their own, a development that led to both the democratization and division of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, and Sudan. In Canada, Scotland, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Sri Lanka, Burma, and other states, ethnoreligious movements have emerged to demand the division of the republic so that states can be provided for minority populations. If they succeed in seceding, they will contribute to the further proliferation of republics, though not necessarily to the democratization of successor states. [3]

EXPANSION OF CITIZENRIES

Around the world, denizens and subjects in republics and in dynastic states and their colonies aspired to citizenship and suffrage. Alone and in groups,

they created aspiring social movements to obtain these rights. The ascent of different groups slowly expanded citizenries in the republics.

In the United States, aspiring groups adopted different approaches to change. In the early nineteenth century, adult white men without property organized as taxpayers and veterans in relatively small groups to demand suffrage from legislators in separate states. They did not approach the federal government as a group to seek change. Feminists first adopted the same strategy, lobbying legislators in individual states to grant women suffrage, though unlike white men, they organized large organizations based on a shared identity as women. But they later abandoned the strategy of obtaining suffrage from state legislatures when it became apparent that they would fail to achieve universal suffrage for women and decided to ask Congress and the president to introduce a constitutional amendment on their behalf, which eventually paid off.

By contrast, the emancipation of black slaves (men and women, young and old) and the extension of suffrage to adult black men was the product of federal executive action and constitutional amendments introduced by Republicans in Congress. Aspiring slaves and free blacks helped prompt federal action by challenging southern white claims to possess blacks as slaves and reclaim them as "fugitives" in the North. The determination of blacks to escape from bondage, rise in revolt, challenge white authority in court, support Union forces during the Civil War, and serve in uniform on the battlefield persuaded the federal government to act.

During Jim Crow, aspiring blacks in the South relied primarily on their own initiative to obtain citizenship and suffrage by moving north in large numbers, particularly after World War I. In the North, adult black men obtained suffrage and, after 1920, adult black women found it, too. During the 1950s, black denizens in the South organized aspiring social movements that challenged local and state authority, rather like white men without property and early suffragettes. But when these efforts proved insufficient, black denizens, like the later suffragettes, demanded federal action, which resulted in the passage of legislation that reinforced the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

During the 1960s, aspiring denizen youths organized local and national organizations to challenge adult political and cultural authority. They migrated in large numbers, like blacks during Jim Crow, conducted sit-ins, like black denizens in the South, created large national organizations to challenge conscription and the federal government's conduct of the Vietnam War, and

organized alternative cultures and communities that challenged adult authority in households, institutions, and public settings. Their determined efforts persuaded the federal government and the states to extend suffrage to youths, end conscription, and withdraw from Vietnam in a fairly short period of time (1963–1975).

Of course, while some groups ascended, others were forced down into subaltern positions as denizens or subjects or were forced into exile. Except for exiles, many of the descendants—American Indians, Confederates, Asian immigrants, Japanese Americans, and homosexuals—eventually (re)ascended, though the process took a very long time for American Indians and is still incomplete.

Other aspiring groups have had less success. Minors remain as denizens, much as they did two centuries ago, though they are now organized, as individuals and in groups, to claim rights denied to them by adult authorities. Martha Payne, a nine-year-old girl in Scotland, recently started a global movement that urged minors to protest the poor quality of school lunches; students at a premier public school in New York challenged the school's dress-code policy by wearing prohibited fashions; and Jose Luis Zelaya, an illegal immigrant, ran for student body president at Texas A&M to rally support for denizen and subject youths.[4]

Like denizen youths, convicts who protest their status as subjects of the state (and sometimes private) prison authority have found it extremely difficult to improve their status. Still, they aspire and persist. Inmates in California prisons conducted a three-week hunger strike in 2011 to protest conditions, an extremely difficult thing to coordinate, given their conditions; while youths who were convicted of crimes after being tried as adults have sued to end this practice.[5] But aspiring movements' efforts to improve the subject status of the six million convicts in America—more than were incarcerated in Soviet gulags—have not resulted in substantial change.[6] Still, the denizens and subjects who participate in aspiring social movements are a force for change, even if they do not succeed.

STRATEGIC CHOICES AND DECISIONS

Aspiring, altruistic, and restrictionist movements all made important decisions about their social identities (in gender, ethnic, age, class, and religious terms), organizational forms (as individuals and in social networks, organizations, and political parties), tactical repertoires (litigation, hunger strike, mi-

gration, riot, protest, insurrection, referendum, election, and legislation), and political goals (to define the meaning of liberty, equality, and solidarity). But because aspiring social movements were typically made up of denizens and subjects who have tried to *make* social change, they have had to make a series of strategic decisions or choices about how *best* to make change.

For many years, scholars who studied riots and other forms of collective behavior regarded participants as "*irrational*" actors, swayed by the mob. This view was criticized by Tilly and others, who argued that participants in social movements were "*rational*" actors who could make rational "*choices*," a theory that draws on the assumptions made by economists about actors in the marketplace. I think this is a false distinction based on poor assumptions. Political actors often lack the information necessary to make informed decisions, so it is difficult to determine whether the action based on this information is "rational" or "irrational." Moreover, they often make decisions under duress, so it is difficult to assert that they are freely making a "choice."

It is important to recognize that the strategic decisions made by aspiring movements have not always been "rational choices." Many scholars treat members of social movements as "rational" actors. But this assumes that they can, like consumers, make choices freely and that they possess the information (given by the market) they need to make rational choices. But this is an unwarranted assumption. As denizens and subjects, their decisions were often made under *duress*. A slave's decision to run away may or may not have been "rational." After all, it often ended in capture or death. But it was nonetheless "understandable."

Denizens and subjects also acted without adequate information that might have allowed them to *weigh* the risks and assess the costs and benefits of their action. So they often acted without knowing the outcome, in part because their success depended on the actions and reactions of others. They acted in concert, often without hesitation or question, because their bonds of affection or solidarity *compelled* them to act. They acted with conviction, with a certainty that was unwarranted by the facts and undeterred by the odds. Think, for example, of Simon Bolivar, Mohandas Gandhi, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Rosa Parks. They acted with a determination to seize a chance or turn the odds in their favor. They acted on the basis of principle, even when adherence to principle might get them assaulted or killed. They acted on behalf of others, knowing that they might not themselves benefit from their action. And they reflected on the decisions they made and reexamined their assumptions, tactics, and goals. Although they may not have dis-

covered how best to make change, they learned different ways to make things better.

Of course, many denizens and subjects acted with resignation. They kept their heads down and their mouths shut. They stood on the sidelines, watched in silence, and walked through their lives as if in a slumber. Aspiring movements the world over recognized this problem and tried to change this behavior, urging denizens and subjects to "awake," arise, or, as the Jamaican singer Bob Marley put it, "Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights."[7]

When denizens and subjects in aspiring movements debated how best to make social change, they had to make decisions (or choices) about four related issues.

First, they argued about whether it was best to act in a legal, public fashion or in an illegal, clandestine manner. For example, aspiring socialist movements in Europe debated whether they should organize legal, public political parties, such as the German Social Democrats, and participate in elections or organize an illegal, clandestine party, such as Lenin's Bolshevik Party in Russia. To some extent, their answer to this question depended on whether they *could* act legally, in public, without fear of arrest. Some split the difference. In Ireland, nationalists organized a public political party that ran in elections but also a secret, oath-bound clandestine brotherhood, the Irish Republican Army, that plotted rebellion.[8]

Of course, an aspiring movement's decision to act in a legal, public manner did not necessarily prevent state officials and nonstate actors from treating them as criminals and conspirators. Participants in the American civil rights movement and in the anticolonial movements demanding *swaraj*, or independence, in India engaged in legal, public behavior but were nonetheless regularly assaulted, jailed, and killed.

Second, they debated whether it was best to create small-scale, democratic organizations in which participants would make tactical and strategic decisions or large-scale bureaucratic organizations and political parties in which professionals or elites would make the important decisions. During the 1980s, antinuclear activists in the United States debated whether change was best made by a network of small grassroots groups based in local communities, a position advanced by members of the "Freeze" (they wanted to "freeze" the number of nuclear weapons possessed by the superpowers), or by a professionally run, national organization based in Washington, DC (SANE). This question has long divided aspiring social movements. In this case, activists decided to combine forces and merge the two wings into a

single umbrella organization (SANE/Freeze), which persuaded Congress to adopt a nonbinding "freeze" resolution.[9]

Third, they debated whether it was best to change economic-social-cultural practices or obtain state power and its economic and political resources. During the nineteenth century, Mikhail Bakunin, Prince Peter Kropotkin, and other anarchists in the First International argued that it was best to *destroy* the state, which they regarded as a capitalist institution, and replace it with voluntary nongovernmental organizations such as the Red Cross. Karl Marx and other socialists argued that it was best to *seize* the state, establish a dictatorship of the proletariat (the seizure of power by a faction), and then use the state and its resources to build socialism and prepare the economic and social conditions necessary for a transition to communism.[10] Conflict over this issue led to the dissolution of the First International and the creation of a Second International, where socialists debated whether it was best to obtain power by winning elections, as social democrats such as Karl Kautsky argued, or seize it by force, as Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks maintained.[11] In one form or another, debates about whether to adopt peaceful or violent measures have divided almost every other aspiring movement around the world.

Fourth, aspiring social movements debated whether it was best to adopt nonviolent practices or use violence to make change. In the nineteenth century, the social democrats pursued peaceful strategies while the Bolsheviks and the anarchists chose violence; Gandhi and anticolonial nationalists in India practiced nonviolence while Mao and the Chinese communists argued that power grew out of the barrel of a gun; Martin Luther King Jr. adopted nonviolence while Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Huey Newton chose violence and "armed self-defense."

Of course, the decisions that aspiring movements made about violence shaped other strategic decisions. The decision to use violence persuaded many of them that it would be sensible or necessary to adopt a clandestine approach, create a tightly held organization run by expert professionals and disciplined cadres, and use violence to make significant, large-scale, "revolutionary" change, such as seizing state power and using its resources to benefit "the people" and themselves.

This decision also had important gender consequences. Men often proved willing to engage in violence, and some, like Frantz Fanon and Mao, celebrated violence. But women were extremely reluctant to participate in violent movements, largely because they were often victimized by male violence and

did not regard it as something they should embrace. They believed that male violence, whatever its source, diminished women's liberty and compromised gender equality.

By contrast, when aspiring movements rejected violence and adopted nonviolent approaches to change, they were inclined to take a legal, public approach, adopt democratic organizational practices, and work to change social-cultural practices, particularly the reduction of violence by male state authorities and nonstate actors. Not surprisingly, women found it easier to participate in these kinds of movements than in movements where small, self-selected groups of determined men advocated "revolutionary" violence.

As a result of making decisions about these strategic issues, aspiring social movements divided into two groups, more or less: (1) nonviolent movements that operated legally in public, practiced democratic forms of decision making, sought social-cultural change, and encouraged men and women to participate; and (2) violent movements that operated in a clandestine manner, practiced oligarchic forms of decision making, sought state power, and invited men to participate; practices that tended to exclude women from active or leadership roles (see the chart in chapter 9).

Of course, the strategic decisions that aspiring groups made often changed over time. In the 1950s, homosexuals in the United States organized clandestine groups, largely because homosexuals were subject to arrest and exposure if they gathered in groups or acted as homosexuals in public. But in the 1970s, gay youths urged homosexuals to abandon clandestine politics, "come out of the closet," embrace a new public identity as "gay," and engage in legal, public politics. The first gay pride parades were designed by organizers to change not only homosexual identities but also the strategic approach of gay and lesbian activists. [12]

Aspiring movements also changed their views about violence. The Zionist movement in Palestine and the Muslim League in India for many years advocated nonviolent strategies for change. But in the late 1930s, as the Holocaust threatened and Arab resistance to Jewish immigration in Palestine grew, Zionists took up arms, creating both regular and irregular, clandestine forces to defend Jewish settlers and attack their opponents (Jewish irregulars assassinated a senior British official in Cairo in 1944). [13] In the mid-1940s, the Muslim League adopted the partition of India and the creation of a separate Muslim state in postcolonial India and announced that it would use violence to achieve it. As Muslim League leader Ali Jinnah explained: "Never have we in the whole history of the League done anything except by

[nonviolent] constitutional methods and by constitutionalism. But now we are obligated and forced into this position. This day we bid goodbye to constitutional methods. . . . Today, we have forged a pistol [violent direct action] and are in a position to use it." [14]

By contrast, the Irish Republican Army and the ETA, a violent Basque separatist movement, abruptly abandoned violence as a strategy after years of waging clandestine, irregular wars against state authorities and civilian populations. [15] Some convicted ETA assassins recently met with relatives of their victims to apologize for their actions. [16]

In all of these cases, the decision to adopt or abandon violence had important consequences for these movements, which scholars might usefully explore. Unfortunately, many social movement scholars have argued that violence is a "more effective" strategy for social movements than nonviolence.

IS VIOLENCE A MORE EFFECTIVE STRATEGY?

In *The Strategy of Social Protest*, the sociologist William Gamson famously argues that the social movements that used violence were more effective than "challengers" that adopted *non*violence: "Unruly groups, those that use violence, strikes, and other constraints, have better than average success." [17] Although he asserts that violence "is commonly thought to be self-defeating," he argues instead that groups that used violence "won new advantages." [18]

But Gamson reached this conclusion by making a number of questionable assumptions and adopting a number of dubious methodological procedures. First, he excluded from his study of social movements any "groups whose members are neither American citizens nor striving for such citizenship." [19] As a result of this decision, he excluded from his study any groups from denizen and subject populations who, until 1920, made up a *majority* of the population in America. So he drew his analysis of five hundred to six hundred groups during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from a nonrepresentative sample, a sample that represented only a *minority* of the population. Second, he randomly selected "a small sample" of groups in the survey, fifty-three in all, to examine in detail and then "ripped each from its historical context," arguing that "each challenge had a thousand unique features that have been studiously *ignored*" (italics added). [20]

Using this approach, Gamson made a series of dubious decisions. He ignored the fact that the results were based on a minority of social move-

ments representing a minority of the population, that this minority had a unique, privileged status as citizens in the republic, that this minority, made up only of men until 1920, were often given license by state authorities to use violence against subaltern populations (owners were licensed to use the Pinkerton Agency against striking workers; vigilante groups were given the authority to attack black denizens in the South, etc.), and they were often "effective," or got what they wanted, when they deployed violence. Given Gamson's selective and purposely ahistorical methodological approach, it should not be surprising to find that "challengers," really adult white male citizenries that deployed violence against subaltern populations during the antebellum and Jim Crow period, had "better than average success" at achieving their goals.

Gamson himself expressed second thoughts about his findings. He admitted that he was not quite "ready to conclude that violence basically works."[21] He speculated that violence "worked" both because violence in his sample was typically used by "large groups" who attacked "small ones," a version of "might makes right," and because large-group violence was "tacitly condoned by large parts of the audience [state authorities and members of the white community]."[22] Just so. He knew something was wrong, but his methodological strategy prevented him from seeing why violence might have been "effective" for dominant adult white citizenries in this period.

Gamson did not find that violence was a more effective strategy for social movements *generally*. His skewed sample and ahistorical methodology made it impossible for him to test this assertion or reach a different conclusion. He could find only that violence was an effective strategy for a particular group of social movements (adult white male citizens) during a particular historical period (slavery and Jim Crow). Although he claimed to be studying "challengers," Gamson was not looking at aspiring social movements but primarily at *restrictionist* movements that regularly deployed violence against denizen and subject populations during this period, as we have seen.

Still, it is important to ask, was violence a more effective strategy for aspiring social movements than nonviolence? Although the answer to this question depends on the historical circumstances, the answer is: probably not. I say this for several reasons.

First, aspiring movements have long argued about the efficacy of violence, which suggests there is no consensus on this issue, and scholars should take this lack of consensus seriously. At the very least, their reliance on Gamson's answer to this question ought to be reexamined.

Second, the answer depends on the historical circumstances and the objects of change. The aspiring movements that fought to democratize the republics and expand citizenries within them were predominantly *non*violent. They typically used litigation, migration, and legal protest to make change. They chose nonviolent strategies because they were vulnerable to attack by state authorities and nonstate actors. Aspiring movements that used violence often incited an even more violent response. They also chose nonviolent strategies because they could mobilize both men and women, whereas violent strategies made it extremely difficult to recruit women. Nonviolent strategies made it possible for aspiring movements to create broad-based, multigendered constituencies rather than the small groups "of angry men" depicted in *Les Misérables*.

There are some exceptions to this general pattern. The adult white men without property and black slaves fought violently to achieve citizenship and suffrage. But it was their role as *soldiers*—white men without property during the American Revolution, War of 1812, and wars with Indians; black slaves as Union soldiers during the Civil War and black citizens from the North and black denizens from the South in segregated units during World War II—that helped secure citizenship and suffrage. In both cases, white and black violence was deployed on behalf of the state, not against it, and they appealed for justice as veterans, not rebels.[23]

Third, in colonial settings, aspiring movements often took up arms to throw off dynastic rule and establish new republics. Aspiring republican movements used violence in the United States, France, Haiti, and across Latin America during the nineteenth century and made violent revolutions in Ireland, Russia, China, and Vietnam during the first half of the twentieth century. Their success is cited by many scholars and activists as proof that violence is an effective, perhaps the only, strategy that aspiring movements can use in colonial settings. But even this assumption needs to be reexamined. After 1945, aspiring movements used violence less frequently, and nonviolent strategies proved effective. Decolonization after 1945 was largely a peaceful process, and most of the new republics in Africa, the Middle East, and South and East Asia were established without violent revolution. As the historian John Gallagher has argued, "[There were] no Dublin Post Offices [in most colonial settings]."[24] Of course, aspiring movements waged violent insurrections in China, Vietnam, Algeria, and elsewhere. But the movements that used violence to create new republics frequently also used violence to establish *dictatorships* and subjugate domestic citizenries, which calls into

question their claim that violence was a necessary and effective strategy for social change. In this context, it is difficult to argue that violence for aspiring social movements was an effective, long-term strategy for social change, though there might be some justification for violence by aspiring movements in some colonial settings where dynastic states resisted decolonization by force. In some contexts, violence may not have been much of a choice but a necessity imposed by others who were determined to use violence to prevent change. Aspiring movement violence in Haiti certainly fits this bill. Unfortunately, the use of violence by aspiring groups in Haiti has been used to defend violence in other settings, where it may have been less necessary. Although the proponents of violence were always quick to claim that it was necessary, that it was forced on them, they did not always exhaust or explore nonviolent alternatives.

Although aspiring social movements made decisions about how best to make change, they did not do so alone. They were often assisted by altruistic movements. It is to these movements that we now turn.