

A Cultural Reading of Human Action Organized From the Theory of New Social Movements

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Abstract

Human organizations of all types are determined by the existence of some common objectives in its members and the solution of a specific situation. These objectives are manifested in several shared value systems and in particular organizational cultures. Nevertheless, much of the literature on the concept of *organization* has analyzed well-defined, formally constituted, and institutionalized human groups. Companies and the state apparatus, in particular, have been repeatedly analyzed by said perspective. This theoretical void generated the appearance of alternative theories that have studied how certain human groups and policy promoters have chosen cultural symbols to turn them into frameworks for collective action. Today, to the panorama of organizations that previously centered on products and the capacity to produce them, we must add an approach that addresses other types of organizations with cultural, rather than material, reasons: the New Social Movements (NSM). The aforementioned agrees with a theoretical and methodological approach that seeks to overcome the reductionism of the preponderant intellectual production over organizations. With this, the traditional economic-administrative theory, which tends to tie the definition of 'organization' to the profit that can be generated by acting as a group is left without argument upon confronting the recent demonstrations of organized social action.

Key words: Organization, culture, new social movements

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1. Introduction

Time after time, with increased population levels around the world, multiplication has occurred of both quantity and quality of human organizations acting in the public sphere: productive organizations – fundamentally companies; political organizations – government, parties; religious organizations – church, sects; sectorial organizations – labor unions, university groups; even intermediate organizations of all types – foundations, neighborhood associations (Mora and Araujo *et al.*, 2001).

Grouped among the last mentioned, civil society organizations are seen as instances that can contribute to improve and even solve key questions in the lives of many individuals (employment, housing, education, nutritional assistance, poverty, culture, and art, including clamor among others). Their action is inspired on the restlessness or annoyance generated by a given situation and which see collective action as a form of contributing to settle that dissatisfaction. Likewise, although not all the associative experiences can be considered absolutely organized, many do seek to maintain over time the objectives for which they emerged.

Particularly, in recent years cities have witnessed the reiterated appearance of all kinds of collective movements to claim or vindicate their rights: youth, homosexuals, women, the unemployed, and other specific population groups unsettle the world touted by the preachers of the capitalist model of the 21st century. Lately, the scenario of the political life of nations has been convulsed by these demonstrations, which appear and disappear (apparently) with the same swiftness with which the media assign or do not assign relevance to these in their information agendas. Beyond what is seen in plain sight, social struggles have had, openly or covertly, distinct typology, magnitude, character, duration, structure. The examples are abundant:

Egypt, January 2011: For several days, a mass demonstration deliberated in Tahrir square in Cairo to demand the ousting of Hosni Mubarak, who appropriated Egyptian government power for almost 30 years. This demonstration is added to a series of uprisings (denominated the Arab Spring), which overthrew perpetuated regimes in the Middle East. *Spain, May 2011:* Under the

motto “Real democracy, now!” thousands of youth peacefully occupied the Puerta del Sol square in Madrid to demand for politics removed from the traditional parties and from the powers of banks and finance corporations; denominated 15-M, this movement called on the nation to discuss the future of Spain. *The United States, September 2011*: Hundreds of youth camped out in parks in Manhattan, New York City, to claim for change in economic measures and on the influence of large global emporiums in Wall Street, the world’s most important market district. This social movement has been denominated Occupy Wall Street and inspired a series of similar protests in various North American cities. *Peru, November 2011*: A group youth against bullfighting carried out a collective performance in Lima’s San Martín square to protest against the 65th edition of the *Señor de los Milagros* Fair in the Acho Bull Rink. *Chile, April 2012*: As well as in recent months, thousands of high-school and university students took to the streets in Santiago to demand from government quality and free higher education. *Brazil, June 2012*: hundreds of people gathered in the inhabitants association of *Vila Autódromo* demonstrated in the streets of Rio de Janeiro to protest against state measures in favor of gentrification processes in this and other *favelas* throughout the country. The demonstration took place parallel to the sessions of the Rio + 20 Summit, a UN conference with the participation of over 190 world leaders. *Colombia, December 2012*: In the city of Medellín, the Inter-neighborhood Board of those cut off from Public Utility Services called on all its members to a night time march around the streets with the best Christmas décor and lighting. The lavish luminaries installed by Colombia’s most buoyant state public utility company (*Empresas Públicas de Medellín*) are a paradox against the situation of those cut off from the city’s public utilities, which can reach 10% of its inhabitants.

Like these, frequent social demonstrations in the last decades have proliferated throughout the world. They are recurrent social movements that every now and then take to the streets to claim for fair conditions and for reformulation of state policies and which are added to community work groups that have emerged silently in Third-world low-income neighborhoods. The ways these collectivities externalize are infinite: from the traditional peaceful blocking of a roadway, a silent march, a rally in a public square, dramatization of a situation appertaining the claim, and even collective nudity. Some forms of protest are more organized than others; all of these collective demonstrations respond to organized group actions supported by elements of symbolic order aimed at accomplishing political purposes and social and cultural transformation. Independent of

their condition of social mobility or social movement (Aguirre Rojas, 2008), or if they do or do not accomplish their objective, triggering these movements threatens, likewise, the traditional way of defining and analyzing the concept of ‘organization’, which has – above all else – had managerialism inspiration¹. Thus, rather than understanding the culture of these organizations from totalizing assumptions, we must examine the meanings and the particular ideations linked to the collectivity from which the players interpret their experiences and interactions, and with which they guide their behavior. As stated by Carlos Aguirre Rojas: “Each movement or form of protest and social struggle must always be studied within its particular context, within its singular historical specificity, within its concrete storyline, and within its circumstances and given development curves” (2008: 11).

2. Plasticity of collective action

Although until recent decades, the different types of human organizations were not considered objects of study in Social Sciences, today the analysis of the actions of social and community organizations has brought into discussion the need for a plural theoretical approach (Torres Carrillo, 2004); an intellectual challenge that makes it necessary to rethink the term *organization* in light of the new demonstrations, from a perspective that does not merely concentrate on actions with monetary purposes, but on the cultural or political purposes of the reedited human groups. This leads to pondering that the traditional theory about organizations is insufficient against a contemporaneity that dilutes the most deeply rooted modern presuppositions.

Understanding the term *organization* is now suggested as a challenge upon confronting a literature in which its managerialism (entrepreneurial) readings predominate. A reduced panorama that disavows the multiplicity of organized social forms currently in existence. From a broader perspective, the definition of *organization* must have a much more cultural explanation that bears

¹ Antonio Lucas Marín and Pablo García Ruiz in their text: *Sociology of Organizations* (2002) exposed 4 managerialism currents to analyze organizations: the classical theory, the school of human relations, the theory of systems, and the institutional theory of organizations. The aforementioned is complemented by the text: *La cultura en las organizaciones empresariales* (2002) by Genaro Zalpa.

in mind all the forms of collective action, whatever purposes these may have had in the past or have in the present².

Unlike organizations with profitable purposes (where the money factor is the consideration given to the members of these organizations for their work), in today's social organizations the material retribution transcends the aforementioned; in them, individuals intervene, more than for profit, because they identify with the objectives, purposes, activities, goals, and results, obtained and sought by each group. In this sense, Michel de Certeau stated that "the program elaborated by a group is translated above all into a constellation of references. These may only exist for its members, without being recognized by the rest. This does not make them less real and indispensable, given that communication exists" (1999: 30).

From these new ways of "being in the world"³, Jesús Martín-Barbero considers that the particular social processes in Latin America force reformulating the analyses of these multiple realities from a "non-linear nor progressive reading, but a deciphering of their modes of lasting, of their tenacious slowness, and of their underground permanence, sudden bursts and unexpected reappearances" (2010: 40). These processes are for Castells (1998) the testimony that helps to understand the new identities in the world of the information era and where the struggle for power is related to society's cultural codes; hence, the differentiation among *legitimizing identity* (bound to dominant institutions), *resistance identity* (opposed to the prior), and *project identity* (the construction of a new identity). Particularly upon the last, Castells states: "the new project identities do not seem to emerge from ancient identities of civil society from the industrial era, but from the development of current resistance identities. I believe theoretical reasons exist, as well as empirical arguments, for that trajectory in the formation of new historical subjects" (cited by Rodrigo Alsina, 2002: 30-31). Thus, in the so-called *Network Society* (Castells, 1998) economic rationality based on global flows of wealth, technology, information, and power intersect with

² The existence of an area of knowledge to study organizations is widely justified and is absolutely necessary because organizations extend to all aspects of contemporary life and it is necessary to substitute intuitive knowledge for knowledge derived from scientific and systematic study (Robbins, 1987 cited by De Val Pardo, 1997: 65).

³ Ways of being "new inasmuch as, until recently, the cultural map of our countries was of thousands of communities that were culturally homogenous, but isolated, dispersed, almost without communication amongst themselves and weakly linked to the nation. Today, the map is another" (Martín-Barbero, 1998: 46).

the inter-subjective world of identities rooted to the territory and traditions – a paradoxical world that becomes the scenario for multiple collective expressions.

This paradoxical contemporary reality generates the dismantling in the rigidity of political membership, which has enabled more mobile loyalties and more open collectivities. Martín-Barbero points to this when indicating that social claims inspired by cultural redefinitions have led to a crisis of the representation. “What the new social movements and minorities – ethnic groups and races, women, youth, or homosexuals – demand is not merely to be represented, but to be recognized: *make themselves socially visible in their difference*. Which gives way to new way of politically exerting their rights” (Lechner, cited by Martín-Barbero, 2010: 47).

Thus, the instrumental rationality of modernity has been violated by a social complexity that introduces multiple and new representations and meanings for the contemporaneous. In other terms, the postulates of modernity are introducing voids against the appearance of post-modern modalities of organized operation, which blur the rational models product of industrialization, and which still today resist questioning. “In post-modernity, organizations are expressions of autonomous power, which promote indetermination among units, permeability, communication, and the free play in the use of their essential competencies. Also, and given the plasticity of the times, *symbolism* prevails at their bosom, speaking of culture, images, signs, and metaphors” (De Val Pardo, 1997: 56).

In this regard, it is worth citing the definition by David Snow and Robert Benford on the *framework for collective action* in current social movements: “It is an interpretative scheme that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ selectively scoring and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within the present or past environment of each” (cited by Tarrow, 1997: 214). For Sidney Tarrow, these *frameworks* act as accentuation devices, which underscore or redefine as unfair or immoral what was previously considered unfortunate, although perhaps tolerable. Each social movement points to grievances, links them to others, and constructs broader meaning frameworks. Thereby, the organizers relate their objectives to the predispositions of their target public (Tarrow, 1997).

3. Notes on traditional sociology of organizations

The classical theory of the Sociology of Organizations stems from scientifically studying industrialism. It emerged during the mid 19th century and gained strength during the early 20th century; from Comte and Spencer, with their community of interests, to Durkheim, with the analysis of the division of work that produces mechanical solidarity (ancient societies) and organic solidarity (modern societies). But it was Max Weber who proposed rationality and bureaucracy as the base of the organization of industrial society. In light of Weberian theory, modern capitalism “appears and develops as a phenomenon of economic rationality that enables the extension of the monetary economy and is favored by the actions of political power” as part of a system of rational legal authority (Lucas Marín and García Ruiz, 2002: 105).

The ideal type of organization for Weber was that which responded to the bureaucratic profile, given that “upon depersonalizing and having coordination and control mechanisms, it develops a rational behavior that guarantees the hierarchy of authority, a system of regulations and control of individual actions” (De Val Pardo, 1997: 63-64). Nevertheless, Isabel de Val Pardo clarifies that Weber only used the term *bureaucracy* to analyze the effects of the distinct types of domination and their corresponding administrative organizations. Likewise, in the work by the German sociologist “there is no clear distinction between organization and administration” (De Val Pardo, 1997: 54).

Beyond that explained by Weber, progress from the Industrial Revolution during the early 20th century generated its own theorists: North American F. W. Taylor, engineer and sociologist, who first studied the so-called *scientific organization of work*. For him, the stimulus-response scheme was applicable to companies: the stimulus was the wage and the response was the work provided by the workers to benefit the entrepreneur. Rewards and punishments, as well as the availability of the necessary tools for better performance, are included in Taylorism. Therein, its perverse evaluation of job performance from the time invested in manufacturing products, as a response to Taylor’s restlessness to solve productivity problems. This gained him recognition as one of the pioneers of ‘*scientific management*’. Henri Fayol, and later Lyndall Urwick, would be important theorists of Taylorism in Europe (Lucas Marín and García Ruiz, 2002). From the combination of

different disciplinary perspectives like engineering, psychology, and public administration, emerged the study of organizations that would lead to the general theoretical perspective called Theory of Organizations, a “sub-product” of the Sociology of Organizations (De Val Pardo, 1997), which boomed in the United States during the post-war, from the texts by Merton, Gouldner, Selznick, and Blau, who, in turn, based their proposals on the Weberian bureaucracy. Therein are the foundations of the strong line of the managerialism theory of organizations.

For Luis Montaña Hirose, the Sociology of Organizations belongs to a set of theoretical approximations that over several decades have tried to explain the social dynamic of the organization. However, their inscription on the positivist current and their functionalist orientation, while the changes of the times have provoked the wear down of its analytical and explicative frameworks, and their review since the 1970s. The aforementioned, according to Ibarra and Montaña, was the product of a lack of systematic reflection of the organizational phenomenon, “on the theoretical-methodological bases derived from the critical reading of the theory of organization” (Medina Salgado, 2007: 11-12).

In that sense, for the case of Mexico, Cesar Medina Salgado⁴ has stated that the administrative theory, lectured by the North American school, has shown a technical bias, bereft of all theoretical reflection: although the “undeniable” progress of the administrative theory is recognized in the analysis of organizations; in it, we do not perceive an object of knowledge with strong epistemological bases (Cruz Kronfly, 2002: 112). For Cruz Kronfly, the introduction of imaginary elements with appearance of coherence has produced an illusory scientific effect⁵. Thus, the absence of consolidated pillars in this discipline makes it permanently susceptible to being trapped by fads⁶.

⁴ Medina is based fundamentally on the text: ‘Ensayos Críticos para el estudio de las organizaciones en México’ written by Eduardo Ibarra Colado and Luis Montaña Hirose.

⁵ “The administrative theory, regarding ideological discourse, produces its own ghostly reality – the organization -, to which it attributes a nature, a structure, and some laws it really does not have”. (Cruz Kronfly, 2002: 116)

⁶ “When an idea becomes fashionable, two problems emerge. In the first place, under the effect of the enthusiasm, we run the risk of forgetting the historical and scientific roots (...) those decennials of research and publications within the domain of sociology, anthropology, and ethnography. In the second place, and still under the effect of enthusiasm, we also run the risk of forgetting that fads wane rapidly. In both cases, the risk is the same: not seeing all the wealth of an idea and depriving oneself of all the complexity and diversity of what it could have taught us” (Abravanel, 1992: XVII).

The traditional theory of for-profit organizations articulates capital owners, physical and technological resources, work force, and the product. In it, the objectives of the company owners become the mission and vision of the organization (Cruz Kronfly, 2002). Viewed from that perspective, it is quite difficult for the analyses of human organizations to reach conclusions removed from concepts like efficiency, efficacy, and effectiveness. Although several writers paved the path to new schools to further humanize the stark reflections of Taylorism; for Cruz Kronfly, these later schools simply developed “more effective forms to convert man into a machine, in one more piece within the production organization, although careful in using terminology capable of evidencing said condition” (Cruz Kronfly, 2002: 147).

4. Perspective of the NSM theory

In 1979, renowned North American sociologist, Charles Tilly, argued in *Social Movements and National Politics* that a social movement “is a maintained series of interactions among those in power and people who claim with credibility to represent groups deprived of formal representation, during the course of which those people publicly propose demands of changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support” (cited by Tarrow, 1997: 69). This definition began revealing adjustments in the theory about social movements. Until then, the theory on social movements had followed closely the ideas that since the mid 19th century had been postulated by the forefathers of sociology like Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, as well as the essays on the psychology of masses by Tarde, Le Bon, and Freud, by late 19th century and early 20th century (Riechmann and Fernandez Buey, 1995). Recently – during the 1960s – the Chicago School⁷ guided studies on social theory predominating in the United States (Riechmann and Fernandez Buey, 1995).

However, as exemplified by Mauricio Archila, the theoretical rhythms about social movements in Latin America during recent decades had particular perspectives: first, during the 1950s, came the development discourse, then the Marxism-Leninism during the 1960s. The 1970s veered its course to not only considering workers the main social players, but also the whole set of exploit-

⁷ Through the collective behavior approach, which combines Blumer’s symbolic interactionism, from the micro-sociological, and Parsons functional structuralism, from the macro-sociological.

ed classes, which was more Marxist-Maoist. Later, during the 1980s, Gramsci is reexamined, as well as neo-Marxist theorists like Manuel Castells, Jordi Borja, and Jean Lojkine, but fundamentally Alain Touraine, who defined social movements as the collective action “aimed at implementing central cultural values against the interests and influence of an enemy defined in terms of power relationships. A social movement is a combination of social conflicts and cultural participation” (Touraine, cited by Vargas, 2003: 530).

It is notable that during the 1980s two approaches appeared for research on social movements (Laraña, 1999): that based on authors from the United States who postulated the *mobilization of resources* “to explain the reasons why an individual joined or did not join the collective social action”; and that based on European authors, more inclined to inquiring “for the cultural and symbolic aspects” of social movements (Archila and Pardo, 2001: 30-31). Of the two approaches, the first does not analyze sufficiently how the ideological orientation of these movements has influenced their actions. Therefore, the approach of the NSMs – of European tendency – is closer to the subjectivities of the social agents contextualized within circumstances of local order. All of the aforementioned was because the emerging collective expressions transformed the forms of social mobilization, from the change in the claims of the people and the reflections that emerged from a different perception of the respective realities, where the NSMs are a framework-structure of group action. In other terms, “people who act together in a given manner” (Clemens, 1999: 289), a concrete definition and ready for the diverse explicit or implicit circumstances of these groups in different parts of the planet.

Sociology recognizes two big dimensions to regularize conduct: a) action guided by interests and b) action guided by norms. Likewise, the principles of organization that guide social action are reciprocity, solidarity, kinship, market, social division of work, social honor, social purity, and private property. However, Fernando Uricoechea (2002) has critiqued certain notions of organization centered more on the process than on the structure, when in reality the forms of organization generate particular modes of conduct, appropriate manners of acting within certain social contexts. Today, the base of the NSMs is horizontal, their internal communication processes are much more circular, and challenge the hierarchies pertaining to traditional organization systems.

The position by Uricoechea coincides with the critiques by Rutch (1999) of researchers on human organizations who insist on using the managerialism perspective to make their analyses. Specifically, Rucht has indicated that because of the generalized practice of external observers who tend to assign greater weight to the most perceptible or accessible elements of these groups, we lose sight of organizational experiments, flexible forms of cooperation, or the different structural demonstrations. Regarding this last element, the author states:

“The structure as such is not something susceptible to observation. It is something created by researchers who confirm the existence of regularity and order principles extracted from pieces of observable information that show the existence of a common model. The structure is, by definition, a relatively stable configuration of elements. It remains, although certain changes may be given in some of the individual elements that comprise it. For example, in a society we can verify the existence of social classes, or amid a small group we can note some informal hierarchies. Hence, the notion of structure implies: 1. A point of reference (like the distribution of power, wealth, or roles) and 2. The assumption that some type of social mechanism or organizational principle exists that maintains the pattern over time” (Rutch, 1999:267-268).

Thus, the internal structure of a social group is the result of the implicit organizational dynamic. In an attempt to capture the organizational element, Kriesi (1999) proposes two indicators of said structure: the *degree of formalization* and the *degree of professionalization*. The first is verified through the legal status, the existence of formal affiliation criteria, and compliance with institutionalized tasks. The second is measured by the number of salaried individuals in the organization. Kriesi assures that the degree of formalization “is in direct function of age and the number of affiliates, but not of the financial resources. It is the complexity inherent to large numbers of affiliates that exerts pressure toward formalization. In turn, it can be shown that formalization is nothing more than the first step toward professionalization” (1999: 248). As the number of members and financial resources available increases, the necessity for professionalization will be greater, “as well as the means required to carry it out” (Kriesi, 1999: 248).

Tarrow makes some recommendations to analyze decision making of transnational movements, an invitation that can be retaken adapted to the continental social organizations. Tarrow states: “If we wish to learn something of the form adopted by decision making, we must start by counting the *specific goals* sought, the *type of followers* we have, the *phase of the cycle* in which they emerge, and the connections they establish with forms of organization, strategies, and modes of transnational collective action” (Tarrow, 1999: 88). With this, the postulates of organization and culture of the traditional managerialism current weaken at the moment of applying them to NSMs in general, and more so to the collective actions of the Latin American reality (Medina Salgado, 2007), particularly, because they seek to instrumentalize culture and communication based on theories like the Theory of Systems and Functionalism, which in the words of Armand Mattelart and Michelet Mattelart share the same fundamental concept: that of function, “which denotes the primacy of the whole over the parts. That is, the ambition of the systemism consists in administering to globality, to the interactions among the elements rather than to causalities, in understanding the complexity of systems as dynamic sets with multiple and changing relationships” (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1997: 44). We must not lose sight that the repertoires of organization vary according to the groups amid society, be it among societies or over time, understanding these as forms of “cultural aptitude” (Clemens, 1999: 296).

For Rucht (1999), the current social movements are – along with interest groups and political parties – one of the three basic types of agents of organized mobilization. But while interest groups and political parties generally tend to be formal and excessively schematic organizations, “social movements typically lack formal rules to neatly define affiliation criteria or regulate internal procedures” (1999: 265). And Rucht adds: “social movements do not have constitutions, no formal division of tasks or functions among them; they practically do not have the means to create a uniform and coherent organization and can integrate quite heterogeneous organizational components” (1999: 265). In that sense, it is worth inquiring on the sustenance of these organizations when many of them are only permanent promoted by a few individuals, or have undertaken social projection activities without support from traditional public and private institutions. Often, many of the members of these organizations do not receive any retribution other than gratitude from the population sector for which they work, and rarely do their activities generate immediate personal gains. To this effect, Jorge Riechmann states: “Empirical research shows that ideologi-

cal and collective objectives weigh more than the selfish calculations to motivate individual who participate in environmentalist groups, anti-nuclear protests, and other forms of collective action” (Riechmann and Fernandez Buey, 1995: 22). In those instances, could we explain the existence of these groups in light of the Weberian rational choice approach applicable to other organizations? How can we understand the long existence of illiquid neighborhood organizations in distinct countries throughout the world?

5. The preponderant symbolic factor of social organizations

Knowledgeable of the progress of the Industrial Revolution, Max Weber had explained that the process of *rationality* in the West consisted in the generalization of a specific type of rational action guided by the fundamental criterion fundamental of effectiveness (Lucas Marín and García Ruiz, 2002). The author distinguished various types of social action: practical rationality, theoretical rationality, substantive rationality, and formal rationality. From there, it was felt that if the capitalist company had accomplished a level of effectiveness never before known in human history it was precisely “because it had found a rational organization (*i.e.*, bureaucratic) of work” (Lucas Marín and García Ruiz, 2002: 110).

The key principles of bureaucracy, inspired by formal rationality, were the following:

1. It is a continuous organization of official functions (posts) limited by regulations
2. Each post has a limited sphere of capacities
3. Posts are organized within a hierarchical scheme
4. People exercising the posts could require the necessary technical qualification to exercise them
5. Neither the posts nor the means of production belong to the individuals, but to the organization
6. Decisions, actions, and regulations are formulated and registered in writing

Thus, the formal rationality implied a concern for the choices made by the players between the means and the ends. Within this assumption, “the choice is related to rules, regulations, and universally applied laws; these, in turn, are derived from diverse large-scale structures, especially

bureaucracy and the economy” (Ritzer, 2002: 37). Over the years, the theory of rational choice would trigger diverse postulates, directly or indirectly related to it, which even during instances of analysis about individuals making “difficult decisions” applied the *cost-benefit* economic scheme to the totality of human behavior (Burke, 2007); among them, the so-called relative deprivation, which – according to authors like Ted Gurr – appears because feelings of deprivation emerging within a disadvantageous socioeconomic context produce political violence and aggressions against the *establishment*. However, the May 1968 protests left the Marxist sociologists and behaviorists “rather perplexed”, given that they did not precisely correspond to said rational principle (Riechmann and Fernandez Buey, 1995: 19). This is how the theoretical tendency of NSMs does not consider these as the rise of the marginalized, but as collective action from the center:

“Activists in NSMs often experience intense feelings regarding their cause, but said feelings do not respond to primordial emotions of frustration/aggression that engendered hunger revolts and protests against taxes during the 18th century or revolutionary movements during the 19th century. Additionally, rebel students and environmental activists do not come mostly from the ranks of the socially dispossessed. Briefly, these are predominantly middle class movements, whose members are beneficiaries of the existing socio-political order” (Dalton, Kuchler, and Bürklin, cited by Riechmann and Fernandez Buey, 1995: 20)

Within this order of ideas, authors like Jorge Alonso suggest adopting a compressive view of the current social conditions, which combine theoretical rigor and epistemological flexibility: “Repetition of schemes will only lead to not appreciating changes or emerging phenomena”. But, clarifies that we must not fall into simplistic fads, but into “elaborating a solid and new language” (cited by Reguillo, 1994: 100). Rossana Reguillo proposes wondering for the ways in which social players “perceive and structure reality and for the ways in which they relate inward with the very movement and outward, with their peers and with powers” (1994: 104). Further, Reguillo reiterates: “The challenge lies in learning from those fragmented and partial symbolic struggles – and sometimes not as symbolic – and seeing in their interior what they contribute in terms of relation, organization, communication, for the future” (1994: 106).

In general, today's human organizations, like reality itself, are complex, plural, dynamic, and multidimensional; they harbor a great variety of perspectives, ways of performing tasks and interpreting experiences in relationship to the system that stimulates diversity. "They can hardly be sorted out into simple models, given that – precisely – the simple impedes seeing the human dimension of the organizations, their cultures" (Colobrans, 1996: 262). Hence, the organizational experience becomes a space of sense at individual, group, and social levels; or as stated by Berger and Luckman, organizational action becomes a "complex of subjective meanings" (cited by Torres Carrillo, 2004: 11). Therein, we reiterate that in many social organizations retribution is more symbolic than material. A social reality that overcomes postulates related to the Weberian rational choice and Taylorist affectivity.

On the contrary, the theory on New Social Movements (NSM) has stated that these social movements express a non-conventional action style, based on direct action. When the organization of a social movement chooses symbols to framework its message, it establishes a strategic course among its cultural environment, its political opponents, and the militants and regular citizens whose support it needs. Likewise, its practices tend to be involved with its political and cultural purposes, and somehow reedit what has, consciously or unconsciously, its collective history of struggles and success. In that sense, its organizational practices are supported in decision making in participative manner, within a decentralized structure and its discrepancy against typical organizational forms of Western industrial democracies (for example, religious groups or political parties). "Given that the identity and actions of a movement are linked to concrete organizational models, it may be stated that movements upon acting displace organizational models from one vital sphere to others" (Clemens, 1999: 300).

Although we recognize the pressure of domestic economic factors, individuals remain because they identify with the group objectives, from where we see the emergence of all the elements related to activities, goals, and results. "Movements framework their collective action around cultural symbols selectively chosen within a cultural tool box that policy promoters convert creatively into frameworks for collective action" (Swidler and Laitin cited by Tarrow, 1997: 209-210). That symbolic factor is the key element of distinction of these groups, not only against

other organizations, but against individuals who seek to attract attention⁸. Both individual action and collective action take shape “according to what people believe must be a correct action”. Ways of acting known at the practical level are carried out, “as well as those types of actions imbricated in the institutional organization of power and resources” (Clemens, 1999: 319).

Thereby, the challenge of this culturalist perspective of the *organization* is not only to inquire why associations of this type exist, but what is the spirit that encourages many of these groups, which in spite of not being “beneficiaries” of the *statu quo*, maintain their struggle from the marginalized zones of the big capitals, but not against capitalism (as sought by former social movements); rather, using the same tools that it provides. This could be explained by the execution of certain strategies of silent resistance, promoted by the capacity to survive and maintain links and identities in adverse contexts. That is, that within them wills and efforts are articulated to solve everyday problems or to make viable common projects that strengthen the public action of the majorities. “Social movements not only have managed in some instances to transform their agendas in public policies and expand the frontiers of institutional policy, but also, quite significantly, have struggled to assign new meanings to the notions inherited from the citizenry, to the political representation and participation, and as a consequence, to democracy itself” (Escobar, Alvarez, and Dagnino, 2001: 18).

6. To Conclude

Due to the cracks of globalized society and to the progress of information technologies, we have witnessed, as direct or indirect witnesses, multiple social mobilizations that have extended throughout the world. Their claims and grievances have emerged in specific scenarios where the economic, political, or social imperfections have become intolerable. Precisely, the rise of the New Social Movements stems from the operation of the current socio-economic system, individual motivations, and organizational capacities of the social groups (Tarrow, 1999). This leads us to reflect upon the forms adopted by the group action, as well as the typical modes of theorizing about them. Particularly, the NSMs are the most recent human configurations of coordinated

⁸ “When the organization of a movement (*social*) chooses symbols with which to framework their message, it establishes a strategic course among its cultural environment, its political opponents, and militants and regular citizens whose support it needs”. (Tarrow, 1997: 216)

work in the world and which best express the existing social capital in each nation. Adopting the meaning of NSM as the back bone of the analysis of these groups, places the challenge of redefining this concept upon which uncritically has been accepted in light of the administrative theories (Weberian inspiration), and in which is not understood “the rich and varied dialogue on organizational forms that take place at the heart of social movements”. In other terms, the *how* of the organization has always been something secondary with respect to the *why* and *for whom* (Clemens, 1999: 288).

The complex contemporary reality forces Social Sciences to think of the ways how culture is involved in the collective process, its incessant production of meanings that shape the social experience and set the social relations. “Now the social struggle is not merely explained by the contradictions in the productive sphere or, in the distribution and consumption. Cultural and symbolic dimensions enter the agenda of the social players and the minds of researchers. The construction of identities in the collective players gains importance and there is more intellectual sensitivity to gender and ethnic differences” (Archila and Pardo, 2001).

In sum, this new theoretical perspective introduces the necessity for interdisciplinary work to interpret, explain, and establish the new social dynamics. The crisis in Social Sciences is, in part, fed by the weakening of its objects and methods of analysis; bringing us closer to understanding the world around us implies persuading us that the essence of Social Science is today based on understanding the significant. Due to this, we state, with Clifford Geertz, that the “analysis of culture is not an experimental science in search of legislation, but an interpretative science in search of meanings” (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1992: 21), which implies reformulating the social players and the opportunity of “originating new constructions that bring us closer to it in more complex and rich manner” (Archila and Pardo, 2001: 33).

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