

## Analysis of the Concept of Social Movements and the Contexts of Their Formation

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**Abstract:** Social movements, as collective, conscious, and organized actions with specific and well-defined goals, operate through means and tools that are not institutionalized and outside the realm of formal institutions, seeking to bring about change to advance shared interests within static societies. They are considered agents of socialization and effective means of communication and participation, which, over time, transform and evolve according to cultural, social, economic, and environmental conditions and issues. According to Giddens, a social movement can be defined as a collective effort to advance common interests or achieve a shared objective through collective action outside the domain of formal institutions. This paper, using a documentary approach and the note-taking technique from sources and documents, examines the historical, cultural, social, and political contexts in which social movements emerge and function. It also explores the theories that address the origins and functions of these movements. Social movements, as purposeful, sustained, and collective actions by a significant portion of society, can be seen as reactions to—or consequences of—the continuous processes of social change (or modernization trends) in modern societies. Conservatism, reformism, and revolutionary orientations represent the three common approaches that social movements adopt in response to social changes.

**Keywords:** Social Movements, Political Awareness, Function, Contexts.

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### Introduction

A social movement is a dynamic process initiated by large numbers of individuals and groups aiming either to achieve or to prevent certain objectives in society. It represents one of the various forms of collective behavior — a response by a segment of the population to a particular situation or issue. Social movements, as one type of collective and protest-oriented behavior (and as extensive networks of individuals, circles, and both formal and informal groups), are phenomena specific to modern societies. Throughout history, protest uprisings — collective but reactive actions — have emerged against the oppression of landlords, rulers, and tyrants. However, social movements go beyond mere protest by striving to put “ideas and programs” into practice within society. The ideas and protests expressed by movements may be directed toward criticizing government policies or toward challenging everyday lifestyles promoted by official institutions. For at least two centuries, modern societies have faced these movements as one of the primary agents of social change. In other words, such social movements tend to arise in societies where political participation through political parties is either not institutionalized or where social actors lack confidence in maximizing collective benefits through party organizations (Jalaeipour, 2010: 19–22). The objectives of social movements are numerous — ranging from transforming or overthrowing the existing order to advocating issues such as the prohibition of alcoholic beverages, the abolition of the death penalty, the ban on nuclear weapons, and the recognition of women’s legal and political rights, among others. The means adopted by social movements vary as well, extending from simple propaganda and efforts to influence public opinion to the use of violence. Nevertheless, irrespective of the aims and methods employed, social movements are always characterized by a new ideological foundation (Blumer, 1996: 64).

“In comparison with traditional societies, the number of social movements in modern industrial societies is far greater, and this multiplicity of movements corresponds with the multiplicity of elites. In ancient societies, social movements were virtually nonexistent or rare, whereas in peasant societies they

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appeared more frequently — originating in peasant revolts and uprisings. Yet even in such societies, these movements were short-lived, especially since, unlike urban societies, they did not form a continuous part of the social organization of peasant communities.” (Guy Rocher, 1924: 130) Today, social movements have become a nearly normal aspect of social and political life in Western societies, particularly in the modern era. Over the past few centuries, Western societies have continuously confronted social movements. Names such as peasant movements, labor movements, anarchist, syndicalist, civil rights, anti-war, anti-nuclear, women, and environmental movements constitute only a portion of the most prominent and widespread examples. Urban movements of the poor, known as “bread movements,” are also among the types of urban social movements. In this context, one of the contemporary challenges faced by urban planning and management systems — closely intertwined with the characteristics of modern societies at the macro level and modern urban society at the micro level — concerns the stabilization of citizenship rights. The most evident manifestations of citizenship in modern societies can be observed in the formation of parliamentarism, separation of powers, nation-state, electoral system, party system, social movements, welfare state, local governments, non-governmental organizations, and especially in the expansion of civil rights (Cohen, 2007: 56).

**The Concept of Social Movement from the Perspective of Scholars**

A social movement is defined as a form of organized collective action carried out consciously, in which participants internalize the values, norms, and objectives of the movement. These actions gather around a structural gap or public dissatisfaction, forming networks of informal interactions to articulate their demands or protests by taking advantage of political (structural or situational) opportunities, thereby seeking to influence the political system. As one scholar defines it, social movements are “*informal networks based on shared beliefs and solidarity, mobilized through continuous use of various forms of protest around conflictual issues*” (Della Porta, 2004: 135).

The French thinker Henri de Saint-Simon was the first to introduce the term “*social movement*” into academic discourse in the early 19th century.

**The Concept of Social Movements from the Perspective of Thinkers**

Different sociologists and thinkers have defined *social movements* from their own theoretical lenses. Below is a synthesis and English translation of each scholar’s view:

Table (1):

Theorist	Scholar’s View
<b>Anthony Giddens</b>	Social movements are collective efforts undertaken to promote common interests or achieve a shared goal through collective action outside the sphere of formal institutions.
<b>Lumer</b>	Defines social movements as <i>the conscious and symbolic grouping of individuals within an ongoing process of social construction.</i>
<b>Thomas Bottomore</b>	Considers a social movement as <i>a form of collective effort that arises to create or resist change in the society of which it itself is a part.</i>
<b>Dresler</b>	Views a social movement as <i>a deliberate and intentional goal pursued by a large number of people seeking change through collective effort.</i>
<b>Herbert Blumer</b>	Believes <i>social movements can serve as collective sources for establishing a new social order.</i> They begin in unrest—driven by dissatisfaction with the existing patterns of life—and are fueled by <i>hopes and aspirations for a new order of living.</i> In essence, social movements are <i>conscious, collective, and organized efforts</i> to bring about change through <i>non-institutional means</i> within the broader social or urban system.
<b>Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci</b>	Consider social movements as <i>forces that challenge and break through the limits of the existing social system.</i> Such movements often engage in activities aimed at influencing governments, political parties, and policymakers — though some may instead focus on <i>conflicts within civil society itself.</i>
<b>Jean L. Cohen</b>	Argues that <i>social movements produce both heroes and jesters.</i> They attempt to <i>elevate individuals beyond their egoistic selves,</i> awakening courage, altruism, and

	boldness. Men and women driven by social movements become <i>inflamed by the injustices, sufferings, and concerns</i> they observe around them, transcending ordinary social structures to <i>battle against the evils of society</i> .
<b>Manuel Castells</b>	Defines a social movement as <i>a form of purposeful collective action</i> that may end in success or failure but <i>transforms the values and institutions</i> of society.
<b>Niklas Luhmann</b>	Views a social movement as <i>a mechanism that converts societal negation into productive social functions</i> — that is, turning criticism into constructive social activity.
<b>Alberto Melucci</b>	Analytically defines social movements as <i>forms of collective action based on solidarity, persistence of conflict, and the breaking of systemic constraints in the performance of action</i> .
<b>McCarthy and Zald</b>	Describe a social movement as <i>a collection of ideas and beliefs held by a group of individuals expressing a preference for changing certain elements of the social structure or the distribution of social benefits</i> .
<b>Guy Rocher</b>	Sees social movements as consisting of <i>two main components</i> : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Networks of groups and organizations</i> that mobilize for progressive protest actions intended to achieve social change (the ultimate goal of social movements).</li> <li>2. <i>Individuals</i> who participate in protest activities and provide supporting resources to the groups and organizations.</li> </ol>
<b>Charles Tilly</b>	Defines a social movement as comprising: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Collective struggles</i> involving purposeful demands.</li> <li>2. <i>Public demonstrations</i> of those demands — including associations, meetings, demonstrations, and media statements.</li> <li>3. <i>Representations of unity, numbers, and commitment</i> that signify solidarity and collective strength.</li> </ol>
<b>Alain Touraine</b>	A social movement reflects <i>the impact of collective actors in pursuing comprehensive cultural values and orientations</i> , often in <i>opposition to rivals dependent on instruments of power relations</i> .
<b>Ralph Turner</b>	Defines a social movement as <i>a form of collective action</i> by those seeking to <i>promote, strengthen, or bring about change in society or in one of its parts</i> .
<b>Turner and Killian</b>	Describe social movements as <i>the collective actions of groups of people mobilized to advocate, promote, and ultimately implement change — or to prevent change — in society as a whole or in certain segments of it</i> .

Recognizing the contexts and conditions that lead to the formation of social movements is essential, given their effective role as agents of change, identity formation, and the revitalization of the public sphere. New social movements emerged suddenly and rapidly starting in the 1960s. Below is a brief look at some of the psychological and sociological preconditions and consequences.

### Psychological and Sociological Precursors

Variables such as social dissatisfaction, incongruity, marginalization, and feelings of deprivation among social groups, coupled with a mismatch between expectations and reality, lead to discontent, frustration, and ultimately, the formation of social movements.

### Structural Components (Durkheim's View)

According to Émile Durkheim, during the evolution of societies and the transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, traditional order and cohesion collapse. If a new order fails to replace it, collective behaviors like social movements may emerge from the resulting vacuum, often based on a system of meaning and belief created in reaction to and dissatisfaction with the established order.

### Neil Smelser's Functionalist Perspective

Smelser, working within the functionalist tradition stemming from Durkheim, views revolution as the most intense form of social change, differing from other types only in its speed and level of violence.

He argues that societal modernization and the expansion of the division of labor lead to structural diversification, which in turn causes a breakdown in social cohesion. As new components and structures emerge, they struggle to form an organic (interdependent) relationship with other parts, thus creating the risk of social equilibrium collapse. This loss of cohesion and overall imbalance leads to psychological stress, anxiety, and imbalance at the individual level, increasing dissatisfaction with the performance of established institutions. People begin to fantasize about a better situation, and this activity becomes the source for the genesis of new ideologies.

### **Smelser's Six Conditions for Collective Action (and Social Movements Specifically)**

Neil Smelser identified six necessary conditions for collective action in general, and social movements in particular:

1. **Structural Background (Context):** Refers to the general social conditions that either encourage or inhibit the formation of different types of social movements. Most macro-sociological theories prioritize social structures. Social movements seek to create novel ways and styles of life, built upon the rifts created by structures for various reasons. In the modern era, social movements, through the production of new ideologies, are primary agents of social transformation.
2. **Structural Strain:** Relates to roles within society that create conflicting resources or pressures internally.
3. **Prevalence of Generalized Beliefs:** Social movements are shaped by specific ideologies that crystallize dissatisfaction and also propose practical solutions for resolving it.
4. **Inciting Factors (Accelerants):** These are the specific events or incidents that mobilize and convince members and supporters to engage in collective action.
5. **Group Coordination:** For a movement to exist, there must be an organized pattern of communication among participants, often supported by financial backing.
6. **Social Control Function:** Ruling authorities may respond to the movement by intervening and adjusting the structural background and strain that motivated its emergence (Smelser, 1963).

### **Manuel Castells on Identity in the Global Age**

Castells suggests that in the age of globalization, structures determine individual identity, and the individual has very little power to influence identity-forming processes. Consequently, **religious**, ethnic, and racial identities are likely to become the unifying factor for individuals and the source of meaning in their lives (Castells, 2006: 86).

### **The Three Principles of Social Movements from the Perspective of Alain Touraine**

1. **The Principle of Identity:** This means the movement must specify whom it is composed of, whose spokesperson it is, and whose interests it defends and protects (e.g., workers, women, peasants, etc.).
2. **The Principle of Antagonism or Opposition:** A social movement is always positioned against some obstacle or resistant force, and consequently, it constantly seeks to overcome an enemy or enemies. Without the principle of antagonism, a social movement cannot exist.
3. **The Principle of Totality (Generality):** The action of a social movement is inspired by a thought or belief that strives for the greatest possible expansion and progress. Even in cases where the movement represents or defends a specific group, it bases its claim on universal values and truths recognized and accepted by all humans or by the entire society. This is why the motivations for the action of a social movement might be expressed as national interest, human freedom, collective welfare and happiness, human rights, public health, or divine command (Touraine, 1972: 123).

### **Characteristics of Traditional Social Movements**

#### **1. Organization and Structure**

Social movements are situated on a spectrum between fully bureaucratic organizations and simple protest situations. The leadership of the movement is a central pillar of all social movements. In

traditional movements, leadership possesses the authority and the ability to generate excitement among the masses. In new movements, authority is not concentrated in the leadership's personality but is a mixture of rational-charismatic authority.

2. **Actors**

**Traditional and macro-level movements** often emphasize macro-concepts such as class, religion, and ethnicity, with a defining characteristic being antagonistic identity demarcations. The achievements of the movement are exclusively attributed to the movement's actors. In new movements, members of the global national society will also benefit from the movement's achievements.

3. **Goals**

**Traditional and macro-level movements** have ambitious goals and ideals, seeking to overthrow the existing order and replace it. In contrast, new movements have more limited, precise, and attainable goals.

4. **Collective Action Mechanism**

In practice, traditional and macro-level movements were entirely radical, and sometimes guerrilla and armed movements grew out of them. In these movements, the goals and ideals of the movement take precedence over the physical existence of individuals. Meanwhile, new movements employ peaceful methods, rejecting violence and relying on persuasion (boycott, strike, peaceful and lawful demonstration, tax refusal) to achieve their goals. Today, social movements utilize the internet and electronic space for better organization of activities and faster information dissemination to their members (Bashiriyeh, 193: 1998).

**Porta and Diani in their book *Introduction to Social Movements* outlined four main characteristics for New Social Movements (NSMs)**

**A: Informal Interaction Networks:** Such networks facilitate the circulation of essential action resources (information, experiences, expertise, and material resources) like broader semantic systems. Thus, networks help create the preconditions for mobilization and provide the appropriate structure for presenting worldviews and lifestyles.

**B: Shared Solidarity and Beliefs:** The existence of shared beliefs and perceptions is necessary for the formation of a collective identity. They sometimes shape this common and unifying factor by revising existing ideas or inventing a new one.

**C: Collective Action Based on Conflict:** This means that actors in a social movement are seeking either to create or oppose a social phenomenon, whether at a systemic or non-systemic level.

**D: Deployment of Protest:** Instead of participating in voting and presenting views through the normal process, new social movements always employ various forms of protest (Diani, 1992).

**Distinguishing Features of New Social Movements Compared to Other Social Movements from Nash's View**

1. They are Non-Instrumental: That is, they do not represent the direct interests of specific social groups, but rather express universal and often critical concerns and attitudes regarding the *moral* state of affairs.
2. The Orientation of these Movements is Mostly Towards Civil Society rather than the State. For this reason, the majority of their activities, concerns, and actions are directed toward expanding the functional spheres of civil society in environmental, cultural, recreational sectors, institutions, and public opinion. They pay little attention to the functions of administrative and governmental institutions, nor to the prevailing power and political systems; rather, they adopt a challenging and protesting stance within authoritarian processes.
3. These movements are organized in informal, open, and flexible ways and avoid hierarchy, bureaucracy, and sometimes even setting conditions for membership.
4. These movements are heavily reliant on mass media (such as publications, newspapers, articles, internet networks, satellites, and the like), through which their demands and protests are voiced, and their ideas are effectively conveyed to conquer public thought and emotion.

5. The discourse of new movements is not comprehensive and universal; rather, they pursue more limited goals, solutions, and demands. They are often decentralized, dispersed, and small. Giving meaning to the personal aspects of life over the collective aspects of life, and prioritizing non-material goals over other motivations, is of great importance (Nash, 2002: 45).

### **Functions of Social Movements**

New social movements have numerous functions. Expanding democratic procedures in spheres of collective life, revitalizing the public sphere, creating a pluralistic space for political decision-making, and critiquing the sources of legitimacy in political-cultural and ideological systems are among the functions of new movements. Social movements strive to create a sphere where actors can freely discuss various issues, free from structural pressures. Habermas believes that new movements do not use violent methods and create gradual and systematic changes through communicative rationality. He maintains that these movements prevent the erosion of the public sphere and the colonization of the life-world in capitalist societies. Another function of the movements is identity construction. Modern identity is a fragmented and fractured identity. Sources of identity-building and the process of identity formation in traditional societies are limited and unified. Today, social movements and non-governmental organizations, alongside political systems, grant identity to individuals and groups.

Social movements create cohesion, solidarity, and trusting relationships among members by producing a specific identity. Social movements are actually an effective means of communication in participation and lead to the creation of true collective consciousness in a society or a specific segment of it. The struggles of social movements are an effort to make others accept what the members themselves accept; they fight to prove what others deny (Melucci, 1989: 46). According to Melucci, the emphasis on individual identity in complex societies is related to new forms of collective action in social movements. Social movements affect the historical development of societies by pressuring power elites. This pressure can operate in various ways, such as electoral struggles, influencing public opinion, threats, strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, etc. (Roucheh: 1999, 135-137). Furthermore, they make the society, its social structures, values, and norms known to the members of these movements and others. Another of the most important functions of social movements is that they introduce new forces into the arena of political-social life and activity, thereby increasing the general capacity of society.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Social Movements**

#### **A) Conservative Approaches**

Conservatism generally refers to ideas and behaviors that justify and preserve the existing state of affairs in society. In this regard, conservatism stands in opposition to revolutionary and reformist ideas that advocate for social change and the current status quo. Based on one classification, the conservative approach to social movements is divided into three types, two of which surprisingly defend social change.

#### *First Type: "Traditional Conservatism"*

In this type of conservatism, preserving the existing state is more important than changing it, because the current state, despite all its unpleasant aspects, is familiar to us, and assurance, stability, and security have a greater guarantee within this status quo. Changing the status quo means embarking on an unknown journey where threat and insecurity are inherent consequences. In other words, in this form of conservatism, the familiar is prioritized over the unfamiliar, the tested over the untested, the known over the unknown, the certain over the probable, the limited over the unlimited, the near over the distant, the sufficient over the excessive, the conventional over the perfect, and the current satisfaction over the promised happiness in imaginary vows. For this reason, the emphasis on tradition—that which has come down to us from the past—takes on fundamental and essential importance in this type of conservatism.

#### *Second Type: "Reactionary Conservatism" (Reversionary Conservatism)*

This conservatism cannot tolerate the social conditions of the new society and seeks a fundamental change in the status quo; in this sense, it is a revolutionary force. However, this revolutionary force, unlike modern revolutionaries, does not look toward the future but rather looks toward the past. This is because this form of conservatism is pessimistic about both the present and the future, seeking the way

out of the crises of modern society in a return to the golden eras of the past. This is why it is called reactionary or reversionary conservatism. Throughout history, this type of return to the past has happened many times and has continued into the modern era.

*Third Type: "Enlightened Conservatism"*

This form of conservatism understands well that defending religious values and institutions and strengthening the authority of government, family, and institutions in today's complex and unique society is impossible without accepting social changes. In this view, resisting change and social demands leads to the creation of ground for destructive and unpredictable events in society. Therefore, from the perspective of enlightened conservatives, tolerating reform programs is preferable to facing events like revolution. These conservatives use an analogy: "In the face of storms caused by social change, one must bend like a willow tree, because the pride and rigidity of the seemingly sky-high oak tree in the face of these storms will lead to its uprooting" (Tilly, 2004: 245).

**B) Reformist Approaches**

It is commonly assumed that the reformist approach does not stand against social change like conservative approaches, and unlike the revolutionary approach, it does not emphasize fundamental and sudden changes, but rather seeks gradual changes. Alternatively, it is said that reformist approaches do not seek structural changes in the system.

*First Level: Theoretical Foundations of Reformism*

The theoretical foundations of reformism are based on the theoretical foundations of the Enlightenment era, which were: 1) Man must first rely on his own reason, not the legacy of the past (or tradition); 2) Man, with the help of reason, examines the constituent elements of the vast "tradition," (even an enlightened person chooses their religion based on their own reason) and then makes it the basis of their behavior; 3) Man can, by applying his rational power, build his society and world and break free from the shackles placed on his hands and feet by ancestors in the political, social, and cultural spheres. The prominent example of the rational model is the rationality of the experimental sciences.

*Second Level: The Revolutionary Approach (Preference for Reform)*

Adherence to the reformist approach means that versions of evolutionary and gradual changes are preferred over revolutionary and sudden changes. According to proponents of bottom-up and civil reformism, gradual and reformist processes have at least three fundamental advantages over revolutionary and sudden processes:

1. First, through gradual, calm, and peaceful reforms and changes, the "social cohesion and solidarity" of society is not disrupted.
2. Second, in reform processes, what already exists in society does not lose its validity, and there is no intention to destroy it; rather, changes are based on reforming "what is." This means that reforms rely on pragmatic political methods and are not modeled on abstract and idealistic theories.
3. Third, reformism proceeds based on the scientific method and is dependent on trial and error. In other words, progress and advancement occur through reforms whose consequences can be continuously observed and evaluated. Thus, in reformism, unlike revolutionism, the "desire" to change the world does not take precedence over our "knowledge" of the world and society and how it works.

*Third Level: Addressing the Question of Continued Reform*

This level addresses the question: Given the side effects resulting from continuous changes and reforms in modern society, is it still correct to speak of reform programs, progress, and societal advancement? The continuation of reform programs and development over the past few decades has brought side effects for modern society, including the fact that problems arising from welfare policies in the last two decades have opened the door for neoliberal policies seeking to shrink the role, duties, and size of the state. In response, reformist socialist and democratic parties have been forced to support free-market

forces to attract public opinion (especially to attract the new middle class, which is growing significantly) and, instead of emphasizing economic and welfare management and the generalization of social justice, have emphasized responsibility, self-reliance, and individual dignity, incorporating the issue of tax reduction—which benefits capitalists—into their platforms (Jalaeipour, 2003: 105-117).

### C) Revolutionary Approaches

In contrast to conservative ideologies, revolutionary models and ideas are not cautious or pessimistic about social change; rather, they enthusiastically, eagerly, and boldly welcome these social transformations. Nevertheless, contrary to the common understanding, not all revolutionary ideologies seek fundamental changes in all components of society. Based on the experience of revolutionary movements in the history of modern societies, three types of revolutionary ideologies can be identified, in each of which change is advocated at a specific depth within society: Political Revolution, Social Revolution, and Cultural Revolution.

#### *First Type: Political Revolution*

This type of revolution relies on the liberal thought of the Enlightenment era. In this line of thinking, personal, autocratic, monopolistic, and corrupt governments are criticized. Emphasis is placed on the harmful effects of these governments, which stem from their failure to understand and respond to the dynamics and changes in modern society. Political revolutionaries defend the political equality of all citizens and the necessity for governments to become institutionalized, lawful, and accountable.

#### *Second Type: Social Revolution*

This type of revolution is rooted in the revolutionary heritage of the Enlightenment. In this school of thought, not only conservative and reformist approaches, but also the model of political revolution, are discredited. Within the heritage of revolutionary thought (and especially Marxism), two types of social revolutions can be traced:

1. **The revolution based on the model of the French Revolution:** This revolution was social in the sense that political changes at the top of the social pyramid stemmed from structural transformations within society itself, and the main challenge occurred among the primary classes of society. According to Marx, who was optimistic about the future of society and history, the social revolution—arising from class conflict—is the locomotive driving society and history toward progress. The revolution, after raising awareness among the working class about their interests and exploitative conditions, and after organizing them, defeats the bourgeoisie, taking political power and abolishing private property, pushing society toward a classless, communist state that heralds the socialist revolution.
2. **The second type of social revolution** in the Marxist heritage has a different description. As Marx had predicted, the idea of a social revolution as described above did not repeat or occur in the 19th and 20th centuries. Consequently, at the beginning of the 20th century, we witnessed the prominence of another form of social revolution, one more influenced by the 1917 Russian Revolution model. The first type is based on class antagonism, and the revolution gradually ripens with the growth of the two main classes of society, and its occurrence seems automatic and necessary. However, Lenin, the leader of the Russian Revolution, argued that one should not wait for the social revolution to arrive on its own; rather, it must be *made* and brought about. In other words, revolutions do not come on their own; they must be brought. This model was realized after Russia in China, and subsequently gained traction throughout the 20th century, especially after World War II, among many revolutionary groups in the Third World (or developing) societies that lacked an industrial structure, such as Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, and Nicaragua (Navabakhsh, 2009: 145).

#### Third Type: Cultural Revolution Thought

*(The provided text skips the detailed definition of a distinct “Cultural Revolution” type and immediately discusses a hybrid movement called “Asghlāb” or “Revolution-Reform,” which seems to be the author’s intended third category based on Iranian experience, placed within the broader framework of revolutionary thought.)*

In his book, Jalaipour speaks of a new type of social movement called “Asghlāb”, which is a combination of the reformist and revolutionary types. He introduces this type of movement as follows: The experience of the Islamic Revolution and the Second Khordad Movement provided an opportunity to become familiar with the characteristics of two well-known types of social movements: revolutionary movements and reformist movements. However, there is less familiarity with a third, unconventional type of these movements, which is “Asghlāb.”

All social movements share four common characteristics:

1. The emergence of one or more prominent social cleavages.
2. The emergence of a specific discourse.
3. The presence of organizations, associations, and informal networks.
4. The possibility of protest under three conditions:
  - The protest aspect of the movement can be facilitated if the state apparatus or policy has a democratic structure, in which case protest is legally permitted.
  - The government is not democratic but is weak and cannot silence the movement’s opposing voice.
  - The movement’s social power is so effective that the government’s political power is unable to cope with this power in the current age of information and the “showcase world.” This third condition relates to the conditions of social movements in the last one or two decades, where the globalizing waves of the world have seen increasing growth.

Despite all this, social movements (whether revolutionary, reformist, or *Asghlāb*) become active only when at least the four aforementioned characteristics are visible in society; otherwise, they are either dormant movements or they are not movements at all, but rather phenomena that fit within other social concepts.

Experiential Examples of These Movements

The empirical examples of these movements in various societies are the basis upon which the **typology** (classification) of these three types of movements has been established. Although the rise of modern society—with a history dating back at least two centuries—has seen the emergence of social movements, the intense activity of the aforementioned three types of movements is mostly related to the experience of societies in the 20th century.

- **Revolutionary Movements:** Most revolutionary movements in this century were influenced by the model of the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement in Russia (1917). The discourse of this movement placed great emphasis on the sudden, fundamental, and (as it is commonly said) violent change of the existing situation, through which it sought to implement “social equality” and “socio-economic development” not only at the level of the former Soviet Union but globally. Later, the Chinese Revolution (1948) and most revolutions in Third World countries, such as the revolutions in Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, and the leftist revolutionaries in Iran, were inspired by this experience.
- **Reformist Movements:** The model for reformist movements largely originated from the experience of socialist movements in Western European countries. One of the main debates between European socialists and the revolutionary socialists of Russia at the beginning of the century was that socialist goals could be pursued more efficiently and at a lower cost through parliamentary mechanisms. Therefore, these peaceful socialist movements not only led to revolutions in Europe but also resulted in the structure of capitalist states evolving toward welfare state structures. Currently, the peace, women, and Green movements in these countries continue the same tradition of socialist movements, meaning they are generally non-revolutionary in this regard (although these movements have fundamental differences among themselves, they are all non-revolutionary in method).
- **Asghlāb Movements:** These movements are based on the experience of Eastern European countries in the final two decades of the 20th century. Garton Ash, one of the experts and theorists of the recent movements in Eastern Europe, emphasizes that the Eastern European revolutions that led to the collapse of communist governments at the end of the 1980s were not truly revolutions because they did not use violent or revolutionary methods and did not seek to accumulate the masses’ resentment against the communist governments. He states: “If the

symbol of classic revolutions was the ‘guillotine,’ the symbol of non-revolutionary revolutions is the ‘negotiating table’” (Jalaipour, 2003: 130).

#### D) Conventional Theories

The first perspective within these theories is the perspective of class antagonism, which was employed in the “Marxist” interpretation of social movements in 19th-century Europe. In this view, social movements and revolutions also arise from the contradictions of modern society (in the sense of industrial society). Although various classes exist in industrial society, two classes are primary and serious, and the conflict between these two acts as the driving engine for social movements.

On one side of this conflict is the capitalist class, which thinks about greater production and profit, and on the other side is the working class, which is exploited more and more by the capitalist class. The capitalist class treats labor with the same ruthlessness in the brutal competitive market as it treats a commodity. That is, industrial society is presumed to be a society that, to the extent it progresses, also digs its own grave, because this progress comes at the cost of the growth of millions of poor and exploited industrial workers.

Nevertheless, in this view, merely the existence of this conflict and the presence of millions of exploited workers is not sufficient for the emergence of social movements. A necessity is that the industrial working class, as the primary bearers of these movements, must become “aware” of their situation and be prepared, through their own organization, to fulfill their historical and emancipatory mission against the capitalist class and (capitalist society).

In late 19th and 20th-century sociology, labor movements are known as examples of conventional movements. These movements were focused on transforming liberal states into cooperative states, with the aim of redistributing wealth and securing citizens’ rights. These movements were organized within trade unions and large, bureaucratic parties that defended the interests of their members, but unlike new movements, they paid little attention to broad political participation (Jalaipour, 1389: 49).

#### Later Theories: Resource Mobilization Perspective

The main focus in later theories, unlike conventional theories, is on student, women’s, green, and peace movements that have occurred in Western societies since the 1960s. The first perspective within later theories is the “Resource Mobilization” approach. This viewpoint is rooted in liberal rationalism and individualism, which rapidly expanded in explaining the civil rights and anti-war social movements in the U.S. from the 1970s to the 1980s.

This approach, by focusing on the American Black Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam anti-war movement, and (sometimes) the women’s movement in the U.S., rejected the traditional approach and instead paid more attention to the dimensions of social movement formation, providing lengthy and interpretive explanations regarding their emergence, organization, and prerequisites.

The fundamental assumption of this viewpoint is that social movements take shape due to the “conscious and organizational activity” of the movement’s bearers.

There are three prominent theories within the Resource Mobilization perspective:

1. **Olson-Abershall Theory:** From their viewpoint, especially that of Abershall, poverty, frustration, and other social dissatisfactions may exist in a society for many years, but a social movement may not become active. A social movement gets underway when elites and adherents are able to mobilize material resources (such as influence, commitment, friendship, and skill).
2. **Zald-McCarthy Theory:** According to them, new social movements occur in societies that, besides an increase in the general level of public welfare, are preceded by the growing development of social organizations. “Skilled and professional adherents,” who have experience in organizational work, effectively manage and direct the movement’s organizations. The organizational action of skilled members fuels competition among movement organizations to attract new adherents, thus transforming potential adherents into active participants in the movement. (In this theory, “**money**,” supplied by adherents, is considered the most important material resource). They define a social movement as a set of thoughts and beliefs held by a collection of people who express preferences for changing certain social structures and/or distributing societal benefits (McCarthy, 1996: 165).

### **Third Theory: Charles Tilly's Theory**

In his theory, Charles Tilly places central emphasis on the element of “Political Opportunity,” which plays a decisive role in the emergence of social movements. According to him, three interconnected factors prepare these political opportunities for movements:

1. The existence of appropriate mechanisms for petitioning within the structure of governments. In this case, movement adherents advance the movement's demands with the least cost by resorting to these mechanisms.
2. The interests of professional elites present within the state apparatus and major parties can play a central role in facilitating or controlling movements.
3. The third factor relates to the collective action resources of the adherents—that is, the extent to which adherents are capable of using collective actions such as circulating petitions, gathering, striking, and organizing pressure groups to pursue the movement's goals.

Tilly elaborates on his theory using the key concept of the “Repertoire of Collective Action” (*Kazan-e Konesh*). Tilly believes that changes occurring in people's daily routines, the type of work, neighborhood structures, and rural-to-urban migration led to changes in the repertoire of collective action. For example, individuals whose collective life in a rural setting only afforded them customary group gatherings as a repertoire of collective action have a larger repertoire available to them in cities through voluntary associations. In his view, long-term development fundamentally causes the displacement of communal solidarities by voluntary associations. This change alters the nature of customary gatherings and creates newer forms of assembly (Tilly, 2004).

### **Structural-Value-Oriented Perspectives (Value-Framed Perspectives)**

In this perspective, new social movements are explained by emphasizing the new characteristics of industrial society and social values.

**First:** According to Klaus Offe, relative prosperity under welfare state policies, a high level of higher education, and the growth of the service sector (compared to the industrial and agricultural sectors) have led to the emergence of a new middle class in society. According to him, members of this class, along with those who benefit from welfare state provisions (such as students, women, and pensioners who also have a lot of time), understand the shortcomings and disorders of the existing industrial capitalist system, and thus they are the main bearers of new universal social ideals and goals.

Klaus Offe also states elsewhere that “unconventional,” “mass,” or “deviant” political behavior theories, which were widely accepted in the 1950s and early 1960s, posited that mobilization for non-institutional political action resulted from the damage inflicted on specific segments of society by economic, political, and cultural modernization. These groups reacted by seeking sources for “deviant” political action styles to confront that pressure. Based on these theories, this damage included harm to the economic base, access to political power, integration into intermediate forms of social organization, and the erosion of traditional cultural values. The key explanatory idea of these theories was the social “rootlessness” of alienated and marginalized individuals (Giddens, 2002: 156).

**Second:** The explanation of new social movements by Jürgen Habermas, which encompasses three different narratives across various periods of his life:

- **A)** The dominant political and economic system (the market economy) reinforces the phenomenon of “reification” (objectification) like a plague against the values of society and family (or the “lifeworld”).
- **B)** The next narrative suggests that the expansion and increasing dominance of the state and the free market weaken the traditional integrating values and motivations. For example, the principle of meritocracy and professional skill undermines people's deference to individuals and hierarchies based on lineage and honor. Resolving this ailment, which stems from the prevalence of instrumental rationality and profit-seeking action, depends on strengthening communicative action and rationality. (The main goal in instrumental action is profit, but in communicative action, the main goal is not profit but reaching mutual understanding.) Social

movements, by advocating for a more just and participatory society—that is, by strengthening affairs and values not oriented toward profit—reinforce communicative rationality against instrumental rationality (and against the acceptance of the traditional status quo) in the social system.

- **C)** The final narrative in Habermas’s newer works emphasizes the normative and prescriptive role of new movements in revitalizing democracies (i.e., consensus-based ideas), thereby strengthening the public sphere and influencing the inefficient processes of currently existing democracies (Habermas, 1981).

**Third:** Ronald Inglehart, in explaining social movements, points to the “generational” factor instead of the new class factor, resistance to reification, instrumental rationality, or the strengthening of the public sphere. According to him, there is a significant correlation between the three variables of age, post-materialist values, and movement membership. After World War II, people’s security and living conditions improved, and this generation carried post-materialist values. These values emphasize the quality of life rather than purely economic goals. Therefore, the political orientation of this new generation is more rooted in informal relationships based on spiritual fulfillment, self-esteem, and aesthetics. This generation, often under the age of forty, is predisposed to support new social movements, which differ from the old left movements where society suffered from scarcity and insecurity (Nash, 2002: 44).

### **Structure-Identity Oriented Perspectives**

**First, Alain Touraine:** To explain social movements (from the perspective of the Sociology of Action), Touraine focuses on the structure of industrial society. A characteristic of new societies is the striving and combativeness of individuals in achieving individual and collective goals. This combativeness is determined by cultural tendencies in a society whose main and permanent conflict is not over industrial production, but over the control of knowledge and information, or cultural production. Social movements are the collective form of action by strivers to seize control of information. Within the framework of this cultural conflict, the identity of the striving individuals is also constructed. If, in Marx’s view, the order and continuity of industrial society were due to the domination of the bourgeois class over the working class (as the two main classes of society), and the main reason for the rise of labor movements was the opposition of this class against the bourgeoisie due to the control over the means of production, in Touraine’s view, the order and continuity of post-industrial society is due to the domination of one movement over another.

**Second, Alberto Melucci:** Like Touraine, Melucci evaluates social movements within the framework of the cultural challenges of post-industrial society, which he terms the “complex society.” This society is highly intricate, differentiated, and multifold in its heterogeneity (though this complexity has informational roots). In attributing causes to movements, Melucci most emphasizes the factor of “invisible floating networks” among individuals in the course of daily life. According to him, in such a complex and informational society, individuals create and exchange new experiences in their daily lives, which are often unseen, and movements are nourished by these experiences. Therefore, in periods when a movement is under pressure, some people think the movement has been silenced, whereas the network of fluid and invisible relations among the movement’s supporters, which flows through their daily lives, continues its work. They create other ways to pursue their demands, challenge the dominant rules of society, and mobilize people for public protest as soon as an opportunity arises. The supporters of these new movements, unlike the supporters and members of conventional movements who seek government positions through political organizations and parties, are interested in creating a space for the expression of their members’ opinions in the sphere of civil society and do not directly seek power. In other words, the main preoccupation of the actors in new movements is the constant search for meaning and identity in the ever-changing life of the present (Nash, 2002: 163-167).

**Third, Manuel Castells:** Contrary to the above theorists who focused mainly on explaining new movements, Castells, alongside explaining movements like the Green and Women’s movements, directs his attention specifically to explaining religious fundamentalist movements (both Islamic and Christian), as well as nationalist and ethnic movements, which have peaked in the last one or two decades. In other words, he intends to interpret the rise of global movements in the era of globalization, which he refers to as the Information Age. He seeks the increasing and diverse growth of social movements in the

contemporary world in the way individuals find identity and meaning within the structure of the “Network Society,” which subjects the experience and meaning of life to constant change. Therefore, to understand his theory, the core concepts of the “Network Society” and the meaning of “Identity Formation” processes must be considered (Ghaffari, 2006: 145).

The term “New Social Movements” (NSMs) was used to describe movements that gained prominence in the social arena starting in the 1960s. These movements include the student movement of that time, the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement, and more recently, anti-racism movements, indigenous rights movements, the “anti-political” movements of Eastern Europe, and so on. These movements have been considered “new” in two respects, both of which have been the subject of extensive debate: first, that these movements possess characteristics that completely distinguish them from previous social movements. Second, the novelty of these movements is the result of their emergence within the context of a new social configuration; in other words, they are considered new because they are representative and emblematic of new social and political relations.

The characteristics that are said to make the new social movements “original” in terms of orientation, organization, and type can be listed in a pure classification. Based on this view, new social movements are distinguished from other movements because they possess the following features:

- **Non-instrumental**, meaning they express universal and often protest-oriented concerns regarding the moral situation, rather than representing the direct interests of specific social groups.
- **Oriented more towards civil society than the state:** a) These movements are suspicious of centralized bureaucratic structures and are oriented towards changing public opinion rather than governing institutions. b) These movements pay more attention to issues like culture, lifestyle, and participation in symbolic politics than to the claim of socio-economic rights.
- These movements are organized in “open” and flexible informal ways, avoiding hierarchy, bureaucracy, and sometimes even prerequisites for membership in at least some spheres.
- These movements are heavily reliant on mass media through which their demands are voiced, their protests are displayed, and their ideas are effectively articulated to capture public thought and feeling (Asrari, 2003: 231).

These specific characteristics of the new social movements have been defined by theorists based on a more or less clear comparison between the new social movement and the old working-class social movement. The characteristic of the working-class movement is its focus on the corporatist state, aiming for the redistribution and expansion of citizenship rights, in such a way that this movement is organized within trade unions and bureaucratic parties that defend the interests of their members and show little attention to broader issues or more inclusive political participation. If we look closer at the issue, we see that this sharp and relatively simplistic difference between the new and old social movements is not very reliable. Although it is entirely true that in sociology, the class struggle of industrial society is considered a fundamental feature of modernity (and even a definitive feature from the Marxist perspective), in reality, various social movements have always existed in the modern era, and not just class movements, as Craig Calhoun has shown. In the early nineteenth century, many movements, including the feminist movement, nationalist and religious movements, and even aspects of the class movement itself, such as Robert Owen’s utopian socialism, bore a greater resemblance to the New Social Movements than to the traditional labor movement. These movements, which paid close attention to lifestyle and identity politics to embody the social order they intended to establish, were often organized in non-hierarchical ways and used direct action rather than the usual political institutions of the state. However, on the other hand, recent social movements share some characteristics with the old social movements. This is particularly evident in their form of organization. Some organizational aspects of NSMs overtly distinguish them from formal political organizations, to the extent that the term “network” applies to them: they often have a local base and are focused around small groups rather than a national orientation; they are organized around specific issues rather than presenting general solutions; they experience significant fluctuations between intense and weak activity rather than having relatively stable

membership; and finally, they are managed by fluid hierarchies and open authority structures. However, the organizational forms of social movements should be viewed as a continuum, at the opposite end of which they might be bureaucratic and hierarchical, like any other organization. In any case, it is not logical to draw a complete distinction between old and new social movements based on their orientation towards the state versus civil society (Rucht, 1996: 215).

### **Conclusion**

Social movements, understood as a purposeful, sustained, and collective action by a broad segment of society, can be seen as reactions or consequences of the constant process of social change (or modernization trends) in modern societies. Conservatism, reformism, and revolutionism appear to be the three common approaches of social movements in response to social change. First and foremost, we must clarify the question: why summarize the main approaches in social movements into these three categories? Among the main components that constitute social movements are the set of ideas, explanations, values, and directives that guide and encourage the bearers and supporters of movements in the struggle of social conflicts. Before the revolution, this set of guiding elements in Iranian political-social literature was referred to as “ideology,” and currently, it is more often referred to as “discourse”.

Despite the diversity of ideologies, each being a response to the changing conditions of society, and although political sociology texts speak of about twenty types of ideologies, in practice, the bearers of these ideologies usually act within the framework of a conservative, reformist, or revolutionary approach. For example, a liberal, socialist, or nationalist movement might act based on reformist, revolutionary, or even conservative approaches in regulating the behavior of its bearers and in achieving its goals; or, a conservative movement might adopt a revolutionary approach to achieve its objectives. There is an almost general consensus that social movements should be considered a specific type of social conflict. Many forms of collective behavior are not social conflict: panics, fads, fashions, currents of opinion, cultural innovations, even if they precisely specify what they are reacting to, are not social conflict. Conflict implies a clear definition of opponents or rival actors and the resources for which they struggle or negotiate to control. Social conflict cannot be analyzed entirely as a characteristic of a social system if a society feels threatened or does not even intend to survive; specific examples in Africa have been described this way. The emergence of a social crisis cannot be analyzed as social conflict. On the other hand, if a collective actor cannot define its goals within the social framework—for example, if a group demands recognition of its particularity—its struggle for freedom or identity cannot, in itself, create a social conflict. Even when the conflict is far from a matter of outright winning or losing, it must be defined by a field, meaning by goals that are valuable or desirable to two or more rivals. Therefore, the common denominator of all types of social conflict is the reference to real, organized actors and goals that are valuable to all rivals or opponents.

The concept of a social movement implies a different perspective on social life. Instead of analyzing the social system as a set of transformations and cultural patterns within institutional norms and forms of social and cultural organization, this concept emphasizes structural conflict within a given society concerning the control of the tools of transformation and the production of social life, especially a society with a high capacity for modernization and progress. This anti-positivist view of modern societies clashes with the image of a rationalized, cohesive, and flexible modern society, due to the increasing importance of social movements and, more explicitly, the consequences of a low level of integration of conflicts within a social movement. Unbridled conflict of interest, false communitarian isolation, despotic power, and violence are the opposite of social conflict. There is a clear contrast between sociological analysis organized around the concept of society or even the social system, and that sociology which assigns the main role to social movements. The former suggests that the behavior of actors is interpreted as signs of the internal processes of differentiation, cohesion, and pattern-survival of the social system. The lack of a relationship between institutional rules and socialization agents, asymmetry between segmental changes, the gap between cultural values and institutional channels, or more simply, collective upward and downward inequality or social mobility, lead to the production of conflicts and crises that are both disruptive and adaptable.

Social movement sociology, and more generally the sociology of action, can be more specifically contrasted with another sociological approach, from which any reference to structural issues or conflicts must be eliminated. This school argues that we no longer live in a social system, but rather in situations that are nothing more than diverse currents of change. They take the ideas of modernity, progress, and development so seriously that they define collective actors entirely by their strategies, and by their relative roles and impact in the process of change. The clearest example of this approach is the critique leveled against scientific management, as presented by Taylor, Ford, and the business schools, under the name of strategic management. This theory recognizes not its reason and universal principles, but the capacity to formulate an efficient strategy in a changing environment as its central value. Similar to structural Marxism, this political understanding of society is valuable because it effectively renders the analysis of industrial conflict—which has become ideology or even myth—useless, and helps to eliminate the simplistic equation of society with universal values (Cohen, 2007: 55).

Social movements are not exceptional phenomena; rather, they are constantly at the heart of ongoing social life. According to Touraine, four principles assist us in understanding movements. The first principle is the “Identity” of the movement. This means who its supporters are and how they define themselves. The second principle is the “Enemy”—that is, against whom the movement is directed. In other words, movements take shape when a clear demarcation is established between “us” and “them.” The third principle is the “Goal” of the movement, meaning what kind of social order the supporters seek to establish. The fourth principle is the “Shared Cultural Ground”—meaning that rival movements in society do not merely antagonize each other, but they actually share common ground (for example, according to Touraine, both the labor and bourgeois movements in England believed in industrial progress, the greatness of England, etc.), and without a common ground, movements cannot form in society. Therefore, Touraine’s views distance themselves from the Marxist perspective in their emphasis on “culture” and “shared ground” (or the field of action). Moving past the discussion of social movements and structural perspectives, we arrive at the theme within social movements that the idea of a social movement, much like many concepts in the social sciences, does not describe a part of reality but is an element of a specific way of constructing social reality. Many studies of social movements are dangerously unsophisticated. Often, authors, while believing they are describing collective actions or historical events, express their own thoughts and ideologies in a very simplistic manner. The limited value of many movement studies becomes even more apparent when we compare different periods of intellectual and social history. Social movements in the post-World War II era were fundamentally considered as disruptive forces; even “liberals” like Lewis Coser were, at best, on the verge of accepting that conflicts could be functional for social cohesion. After the 1960s, in contrast, social movements became equated with counter-cultural actions, i.e., the search for alternative forms of social and cultural life. By the early 1980s, this view loses its significance (Cohen, 2007: 444).

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