Introduction

MOVEMENT CHALLENGES AND TRAJECTORIES

On a crisp Sunday morning in the fall of 2002, Dominican Sisters Ardeth Platte, Carol Gilbert, and Jackie Hudson prepared to celebrate liturgy and put their faith into action. The three nuns, ranging from fifty-four to sixty-seven years old, put on white mop-up suits – the type used by crews that handle toxic waste and hazardous materials. On the back of their suits they had written "Citizens Weapons Inspection Team" and they wore tags on the front identifying themselves as "Disarmament Specialists." They armed themselves with wire cutters, household hammers, and bottles filled with their blood. At about 7:30 that morning – exactly one year after the start of the U.S. war in Afghanistan – the women cut through the gate at a missile silo field near Greeley, Colorado. They walked a bit further, cutting through a second gate that enabled them to reach silo site N-8. With their hammers they struck the tracks that pull the lid off the silo, bringing the missile into firing position. Then they hammered on the silo itself, enacting the prophet Isaiah's vision: "Nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again" (Isaiah 2:4). Finally, they poured blood on the structure in the pattern of a cross, and concluded with prayer and song. It was nearly an hour before Air Force personnel arrived, surrounding the gray-haired nuns at gunpoint. When the arresting officers asked what they were doing, Sister Gilbert calmly explained that they were fulfilling President George W. Bush's call to dismantle weapons of mass destruction.[1]

[1] This is taken from a press release drafted by Jonah House, where Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert live. The statement was written from the three nuns' account and then sent out to the Plowshares movement email listserv on October 7, 2002.

President Bush was of course referring to weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, not those that the United States possesses. But the nuns were trying to draw attention to the fact that while the White House used this issue as the justification for its escalating war against Iraq, the United States itself has massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons. In Colorado alone, forty-nine nuclear missiles had recently been refitted with new W-87 hydrogen warheads – each with 300 kilotons of explosive power, or roughly twenty-five to thirty times the destructive capacity of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.[2] According to the nuns, not only did this reveal the hypocrisy of the United States, it also exposed the link between militarism and social injustice as billions of dollars are spent on weapons programs that could otherwise be invested in education and social services. As members of religious orders and people of faith, they felt an obligation to act. Invoking international law that prohibits preparation for mass killing, and the Nuremberg principles that call on people to intervene when their government is committing crimes against humanity, these nuns tried to damage the missile silo sufficiently to take it out of commission. They also hoped that their symbolic act would reach the conscience of a nation that condemned the development of weapons of mass destruction elsewhere while vehemently defending its own nuclear arsenal.

Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson were arrested for their action in Colorado and charged with interference and obstruction of national defense, which carries a maximum sentence of twenty years and a fine of $250,000. They also faced charges of damage to United States property, which could have added another ten years to their prison terms and doubled their fines to $500,000.[3] During their trial, the nuns claimed that they were not guilty because they were acting in compliance with international mandates, but U.S. District Judge Robert Blackburn prohibited the nuns from introducing international law and Nuremberg principles in their defense. Nevertheless, Sister Gilbert did have an opportunity to articulate the moral reasoning behind their action. She stated:

> Any nuclear weapon, even by its very existence, is a crime of genocide. In Germany, when they put Jews on the trains and gassed them, it was legal. Nobody was breaking a law. Yet we all wonder how the people of Germany could have allowed Hitler to do this. I believed I had to go there to stop a crime against humanity. I knew this

[2] Information from Bill Sulzman of Citizens for Peace in Space. Posted on the Plowshares email listserv on November 7, 2002.

[3] O'Neill, Patrick. 2002. "Dominican Nuns Face Federal Charges," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 8, 2002, pp. 6–7.

little hammer wasn't going to stop the Minuteman missile, but I could say to my God, "This is not in my name."[4]

The nuns were convicted. Ardeth Platte was sentenced to forty-one months in prison, Carol Gilbert received a thirty-three-month sentence, and Jackie Hudson was given thirty months. Before closing the case, Judge Blackburn called the three Dominicans "dangerously irresponsible." Many of their supporters found this statement ironic since the Bush administration was calling for the development of a new generation of smaller missiles that could potentially be used in a limited nuclear battle. In addition, the White House had approved the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator – a weapon designed to obliterate weapons stockpiles and deeply buried command bunkers. One of the nuns' supporters reflected: "George W. Bush is quite assuredly tilting the world towards a new nuclear arms race. Who is dangerously irresponsible?"[5]

These three Dominican Sisters were not the first who, based on religious conviction, had plotted to destroy weapons. Nor were they the last. They are part of a group that for decades has used radical nonviolence to intervene in war preparation, drawing on religious symbolism to challenge both the government's production of nuclear weapons and the church's complacency on issues of militarism and war. This group, known as the Plowshares movement, has conducted dozens of similar campaigns in which activists enter weapons production sites or military installations to damage weapons, which they refer to as "acts of disarmament." The typical U.S. Plowshares participant has received a sentence of one to two years for such actions, but some have been given prison terms as long as eighteen years. Yet the substantial costs and risks have not deterred others from joining. Since the movement started in 1980, about 200 people have participated in nearly 80 Plowshares actions.[6]

Many observers consider this movement an abysmal failure. Plowshares activists aim to abolish war and weapons of mass destruction. They also hope to persuade religious authorities to reject the church's traditional Just War position and embrace the nonviolent Gospel message. They have not reached either of these goals, and skeptics argue that they are unlikely to do

[4] Quoted in *Denver Post* writer Diane Carman's column, "Nun's Faith Finds Chink in U.S. Armor." April 6, 2003, p. B-01.
[5] LaForge, John, Nukewatch announcement of the 2003 Nuclear-Free Future Awards, posted on the Plowshares email listserv on October 28, 2003.
[6] For a complete list of Plowshares actions, see Appendix C.

so in the near future. But one of the primary purposes of any social movement is to provoke a response, to challenge people to reconsider status quo assumptions. In this regard, the Plowshares movement has been successful since virtually everyone reacts when they hear about this faith-based movement of felons who destroy government property and pour blood. Some are shocked and outraged, especially when they discover that many participants are priests and nuns. Others consider these actions to be futile and foolish, while some find the movement compelling. Almost everyone is amazed at the price that Plowshares activists are willing to pay and the sacrifices that they make to achieve peace.

This book conveys the story of these activists, whose efforts often go unnoticed by the broader public. It is also an account of the movement's progression over time and the various challenges it has had to address in order to be a continual irritant in the public's conscience and a persistent thorn in the side of the church. Despite numerous challenges, the U.S. Plowshares movement has demonstrated remarkable tenacity and longevity, as activists continue to engage in war resistance even when the consequences are harsh, political conditions are unfavorable, and other peace movements have declined or collapsed. Not only have these activists sustained the movement for decades, they have also facilitated its cross-national expansion. Their international counterparts, however, have not always effectively addressed the developmental tasks that movements face. As a result, some movements have staggered along for years while others have never progressed beyond a handful of sporadic actions. Across different geographic regions, the Plowshares movement has unfolded in distinct ways with divergent results.

The varying trajectories of the Plowshares movement led me to examine three key questions. First, what developmental challenges do activists face and how do their choices shape their movements over time? Second, how have U.S. Plowshares activists sustained their resistance for decades, even when the cost of participation is high and political opportunities have fluctuated? Third, what can be learned by comparing the progression of this movement in the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, Sweden, and Great Britain?

Social Movement Trajectories

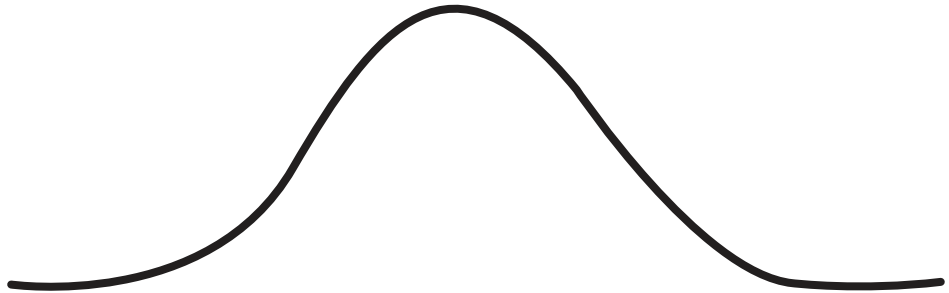
Before exploring the developmental challenges and trajectories of the Plowshares movement in the United States and abroad, it is useful to examine

these issues in the collective action literature. Many studies of protest assume a common linear development in which movements erupt, peak, and subside in a predictable wavelike sequence, as depicted in Figure I.1. At every phase in a movement's life cycle, a number of factors and tasks are critical to the ongoing progression of the movement. I briefly summarize each stage and its concomitant issues here.

Movement Emergence

In Stage 1, a combination of factors contributes to the initial expression of protest. Scholars disagree to some extent on the precise elements that are necessary for movement emergence. One group takes a structural approach, arguing that three key variables explain when dissent explodes into collective action. First, the political climate must be favorable in order to enhance protestors' perceived assessment of the likelihood of success. Even when people are convinced that change is desperately needed, they may be reluctant to act unless they believe that it is possible to alter existing conditions. This sense of efficacy comes from the expansion of "political opportunities" or shifts in the broader social environment that increase the power and leverage of challenging groups. This may entail significant demographic transitions, war, political divisions and realignments, changing cultural attitudes, or economic recessions – all of which may undermine the power of a government, leading protesters to conclude that the time is right to mount a campaign of resistance. Second, there has to be a pre-existing organization that will help launch a movement by offering material resources, such as financial support, along with human resources, including leaders and networks for recruiting potential movement participants. These first two factors set the stage for a movement to emerge by providing ripe conditions and sufficient organizational capacity. But a third component is needed to inspire people to act on these favorable circumstances: an insurgent mind-set. People must undergo an ideological shift in which they no longer consider the status quo legitimate, they begin demanding change, and they believe that they have the power to alter the situation.[7] In short, movements emerge when changing social and political conditions create a favorable climate for challengers, when pre-existing groups provide the

[7] Piven, Francis Fox, and Richard Cloward. 1977. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Pantheon.



STAGE 1 EMERGENCE	STAGE 2 EXPANSION	STAGE 3 DECLINE	(STAGE 4 ABEYANCE)*
KEY FACTORS AND TASKS:			
Political opportunities	*Recruitment*	*Attainment of goals*	*Inhospitable climate*
Mobilizing organizations	*Mobilization of resources*	*Shifting opportunities*	*Form abeyance structures*
Insurgent consciousness	*Devising strategies*	*Repression*	*Sustain movement culture*
Moral conviction	*Tactical innovation*	*Factionalization*	*Rejuvenate commitment*
	Construct identity	*Trend toward oligarchies*	*Conduct limited actions*
	Framing and media work	*Co-optation*	
	Emotion work		

*Not all movements go into abeyance. Some simply terminate.

Figure I.1 Movement Progression.

necessary resources for mobilization, and when people believe that change is needed and possible.[8]

Other researchers note that people do occasionally protest regardless of whether conditions are favorable. Challenging the underlying assumptions of the structural model, these scholars posit that moral convictions and ideological commitments may override concerns about the efficacy of protest or the lack of an organizational infrastructure. In these circumstances, movements often arise to engage in "politics of moral witness." Barbara Epstein uses this term to describe acts of protest conducted by individuals who feel a moral obligation and personal responsibility to denounce a situation and to call for change. They are often aware that the chance of achieving their goals is small, but feel that action is nonetheless imperative as a form of witness.[9] Thus political opportunities and mobilizing organizations may increase the likelihood of success, but they are not necessarily a prerequisite to movement emergence. What is essential is that potential protesters feel that existing conditions are so reprehensible that something must be done.[10]

Movement Expansion

After initial collective acts of resistance occur, a full-fledged movement does not automatically follow. In order to expand from an outburst of dissent (Stage 1) to a viable social movement that can sustain ongoing acts of protest (Stage 2), organizers must undertake a variety of movement-building tasks. Leaders must establish some type of infrastructure to support a growing movement.[11] They must also devise effective strategies and mobilize the human and material resources required to launch campaigns.[12] They must

[8] This approach is known as the Political Process model. For a full account, see McAdam, Doug. 1982. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[9] Epstein, Barbara. 1991. *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[10] For further information on cultural approaches to social movements, see Jasper, James M. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Also see Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. 2004. *Convictions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[11] Gamson, William. 1975. *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey.

[12] McCarthy, John, and Mayer Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." *American Journal of Sociology* 82: 1212–1241.

work with the media and frame their issues in a manner that resonates with a wide audience in order to win broader support.[13] They have to recruit members and help individuals overcome obstacles to participation.[14] They must build a sense of community and shared identity among activists[15] and encourage the type of emotions that solidify commitment and sustain motivation.[16] Furthermore, as opponents find ways to effectively counteract the movement, leaders must engage in tactical innovation.[17] If movement organizers are able to achieve these tasks, they may pressure their opponents sufficiently to negotiate and grant concessions.

Movement Decline

Just as a wave crests and subsides, so do many movements. This third stage – movement decline (Stage 3) – can result from a variety of factors. The movement may slow or cease completely because it has successfully obtained its goals or because it has gained sufficient political representation that activists no longer feel they must resort to politics by alternative means.[18] Political

[13] For more information about framing techniques to broaden support for movement goals, see the following: Snow, David, E. Burke Rochford Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51: 464–481; Snow, David, and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217. Clifford Bob (2005) also offers a compelling comparative examination of framing and media attention in garnering third-party support in his book, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[14] For more information on recruitment, see Snow, David, Louis Zurcher, and Sheldon Ekland-Olson. 1980. "Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment." *American Sociological Review* 45: 787–801. For information on recruitment to high-risk movements, see McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk/Cost Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(1): 64–90. For information on the obstacles to participation, see Klandermans, Bert, and Dirk Oegema. 1987. "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers." *American Sociological Review* 52: 519–531.

[15] Taylor, Verta, and Nancy Whittier. 1992. "Collective Identity in Social Movement Communities: Lesbian Feminist Mobilization," pp. 104–129 in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[16] Goodwin, Jeff, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta. 2001. *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[17] McAdam, Doug. 1983. "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency." *American Sociological Review* 48: 735–754.

[18] Meyer, David S. 1993. "Institutionalizing Dissent: The United States Structure of Political Opportunity and the End of the Nuclear Freeze Movement." *Sociological Forum* 8 (2): 157–179.

opportunities may also decrease and the social climate may turn hostile. The same factors that strengthen a movement's power vis-à-vis its opponent – such as internal divisions within authority structures, realigning coalitions, economic downturns, and changing attitudes – can just as quickly shift favor away from protestors. When this occurs, activists may feel that their efforts are less likely to make a difference, reducing their sense of efficacy and consequently their willingness to protest.[19] Repression can also bring a prosperous social movement to a halt. As a movement gains strength, it is often considered a threat to power-holders, who may respond by increasing the costs of protest. This may cause activists to decrease their level of involvement or to drop out of a movement completely.[20] Similarly, countermovements may arise, forcing activists to fight two separate battles – one to obtain their goals and another against those who aim to reverse their gains or discredit the movement.[21]

Internal movement issues can also contribute to diminishing levels of protest. If factions arise and quarrels are not resolved, a movement can fragment, undercutting its power to act collectively. In addition, successful movements often channel more of their energy into building social movement organizations that will handle growing administrative needs. This diverts both human and material resources away from resistance while blunting a movement's militant edge and its willingness to engage in direct action, because it must now be respectable in the eyes of potential donors and constituents.[22] Moreover, once social movement organizations have been established, they may be co-opted by the authority structures they are

[19] Tarrow, Sidney. 1994. *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[20] It is important to note that repression does not always subdue protest movements. According to Gene Sharp (1990), repression sometimes backfires by undermining the credibility of a government and eliciting public sympathy for the victims – especially when the victims do not retaliate. Sharp refers to this dynamic as "political jujitsu." Sometimes, however, repression does have its intended effect. For a comprehensive list of the numerous tactics used to stop movements, see Marx, Gary (1979). "External Efforts to Damage or Facilitate Movements: Some Patterns, Explanations, Outcomes, and Complications, pp. 94–125 in Mayer, Zald, and John D. McCarthy (eds.). *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control, and Tactics*. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop.

[21] Lo, Clarence Y. 1982. "Countermovements and Conservative Movements in the Contemporary U.S." *American Review of Sociology* 8: 107–134; Meyer, David S., and Suzanne Staggenborg. 1996. "Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity." *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (6): 1628–1660; Mottl, Tahi L. 1980. "The Analysis of Countermovements." *Social Problems* 27(5): 620–634.

[22] Piven, Francis Fox, and Richard Cloward. 1977. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Pantheon.

challenging,[23] or an internal oligarchy of elites may emerge that becomes primarily interested in preserving its own power and privilege rather than promoting the goals of the people they represent.[24] This can undermine adherents' morale and trust, causing them to leave the movement.

Movement Abeyance

After a period of decline, a movement can either cease completely or shift into an "abeyance" stage (Stage 4). Verta Taylor uses this term to describe a phase in which the sociopolitical climate is no longer hospitable to protestors and collective action has dramatically subsided. Although it may appear that the movement has ceased, a small cadre continues to organize, albeit on a more limited scale, and in so doing provides continuity until the next cycle of resistance erupts. During this abeyance stage, movement groups may make little progress toward their goals, and their influence may be nominal. Nevertheless, by keeping the movement alive, they serve several important linking functions between waves of protest. Movements in abeyance sustain activist networks, retain the group's collective identity and goals, and maintain its tactical repertoire. When a new cycle of protest begins, activists can draw upon this knowledge and long-standing tradition rather than reinvent it.[25]

But what enables activists to faithfully and persistently struggle for a cause when their numbers have dwindled, they see little progress, and they encounter greater hostility? Taylor, along with her colleague Leila Rupp, explored this question in their study of the American women's movement from 1945 to 1960.[26] They found that the National Women's Party (NWP) played a critical role in sustaining the movement after the struggle for suffrage, keeping it alive until the second wave of feminism erupted in the 1960s. Although the number of participants was small during this abeyance period, their commitment to the cause remained steady, mainly because

[23] Coy, Patrick, and Timothy Hedeen. 2005. "A Stage Model of Social Movement Co-optation: Community Mediation in the United States." *The Sociological Quarterly* 46(3): 405–435; Meyer, David S. 1993. "Institutionalizing Dissent: The United States Structure of Political Opportunity and the End of the Nuclear Freeze Movement." *Sociological Forum* 8(2): 157–179.

[24] Michels, Robert. 1966 [1962]. *Political Parties*. New York: Free Press.

[25] Taylor, Verta. 1989. "Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance." *American Sociological Review* 54: 761–775.

[26] Rupp, Leila, and Verta Taylor. 1990. *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.