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# SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND WORLD-SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

*Edited by Jackie Smith, Michael Goodhart,  
Patrick Manning and John Markoff*

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## SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND WORLD-SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

At a particularly urgent world-historical moment, this volume brings together some of the leading researchers of social movements and global social change, and other emerging scholars and practitioners, to advance new thinking about social movements and global transformation. Social movements around the world today are responding to crisis by defying both political and epistemological borders, offering alternatives to the global capitalist order that are imperceptible through the modernist lens. Informed by a world-historical perspective, contributors explain today's struggles as building upon the experiences of the past while also coming together globally in ways that are inspiring innovation and consolidating new thinking about what a fundamentally different, more equitable, just, and sustainable world order might look like.

This collection offers new insights into contemporary movements for global justice, challenging readers to appreciate how modernist thinking both colors our own observations and complicates the work of activists seeking to resolve inequities and contradictions that are deeply embedded in Western cultural traditions and institutions. Contributors consider today's movements in the *longue durée* – that is, they ask how Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, and other contemporary struggles for liberation reflect, build upon, or diverge from anti-colonial and other emancipatory struggles of the past. Critical to this volume is its exploration of how divisions over gender equity and diversity of national cultures and class have impacted what are increasingly intersectional global movements.

The contributions of feminist and indigenous movements come to the fore in this collective exploration of what the movements of yesterday and today can contribute to our ongoing effort to understand the dynamics of global transformation in order to help advance a more equitable, just, and ecologically sustainable world.

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## PART II DIALOGUE

### Ideology and interactions of social movements

*Patrick Manning*

The chapters by Soborski and by Wolfson and Funke both center on the dilemmas of contemporary social movements, focusing on the nexus of their decentralized praxis and their ideology. Wolfson and Funke trace the shifts of organizational form generated as social movements respond to hegemonic power. They step around the term “ideology,” referring instead to the “meta-logic of movement politics.” They identify the Zapatista movement from 1995 as the crystallization of a “nomadic” political logic – involving various sorts of “flattening” of movement structures and practices – and argue that such ideology became dominant among resistance movements of the 21st century. Soborski begins with the “fall from grace” of neoliberalism in the 2008 credit crunch – and then its quick recovery – to argue that social movements, vulnerable to neoliberal ideology, must construct more coherent ideology to build movement unity. Soborski gives an explicit definition of ideology, detailing it as a system of political beliefs. Thus, despite the many parallels in the two chapters, Soborski emphasizes the agency of leaders in succeeding or failing to develop effective movement ideology, while Wolfson and Funke emphasize the structural shaping of movement praxis and meta-logic, so that meta-logic is an integral part of the movement as a whole rather than a distinctive ideology.

In this brief effort at dialogue, I suggest that attention to ideology in broad historical context may help sort out the debates and decisions in which Soborski and Wolfson and Funke partake. My own chapter, on the democratization movements of 1989–1992, left implicit the ideological dimension of social movements, but I draw out my underlying ideological argument in this commentary. In the discussion I include Immanuel Wallerstein’s keynote address to the conference from which this book arose: there he set forth a two-century review of evolving social movements and their shifting ideology.<sup>1</sup> Combining them, we may ask

about the complex role of ideology in social movements of the modern age. How does counter-hegemonic ideology evolve and interact with hegemonic outlook? How does ideology shift in the rise, decline, and interconnection of social movements? This brief commentary compares and extends the arguments of these three studies.

The chapters of Soborski and Wolfson and Funke step into an ongoing process of social and ideological turmoil and trace steps of experimentation and evolution in the ideology and practice articulating the vision of social movements. Wallerstein, in his longer-term review, locates the historical origins of ideological debate in the French Revolution and especially the rise of conservative ideology in the revolution’s aftermath – and carries that discussion forward to the present. Wallerstein’s narrative displays the long-term ideological debates, showing how they have shaped our understanding of recent and current ideology. But I would start the narrative at an earlier time and, for that reason, offer a somewhat different characterization of the path of ideological change and the role of ideology in the formation and the fate of social movements. That is, I see ideology as having emerged earlier and more broadly – during the 18th century, as a sort of public debate on social priorities – though I agree that debate accelerated in significance during the 19th century. In this view, ideology depends on the expansion of a public sphere, in which contending interests articulate their views in layman’s language rather than at the level of high specialization. Why should a public sphere expand from the 18th century? A long-term process of expanding literacy was certainly at work in Europe, the Islamic world, and South and East Asia. More immediately, the chaotic expansion in global interaction from the 13th century forward had the effect, basically everywhere, of raising big questions of social priorities and drawing larger proportions of people into commentary on those priorities.

How to define ideology – its constituents, social location, and dynamics? It strikes me that, in societies of increasing literacy, an ideological sphere grew to increasing importance. In it, speakers seeking to represent many social interests and strata struggled in speech and text to make themselves heard. They focused especially on social theory but in multiple arenas: they included not only politics but society’s demographic, economic, social, cultural, and of course religious dimensions, plus the interaction of human society and the natural world. All of these were worth debating. As such, ideology arose as rhetorical representation of the social system, in which contesting participants in the sphere of public discourse argued over different visions of how the social system functioned, what changes it was undergoing, and what priorities should be emphasized in reproducing or transforming society.

To this concise assertion of the nature of ideology I add another element: the range of registers in ideological debate. Ideological debate ranges from the intellectualized and theorized, at one pole, to the symbolic and emotive, at another pole. An effective ideology conveys a representation of the world with

consistency among its intellectual, social, and cultural registers. Change in any one of these areas – new scientific results about biological evolution or shifting social values about the treatment of children – could reverberate through an ideology and transform it to greater or lesser degree. Ideological propositions and concerns, to be effective, needed to resonate at multiple registers, from that of theoretical logic to that of social mobilization and to that of emotive sensibility. Ideology – both hegemonic and antisystemic – thus ranges across underlying values of hierarchy or democracy, theories of political economy, principles for alliances among people of varying identities and interests, programs for gaining and maintaining power, and shared cultural practices. Ideologies can be coherent but only up to a limit: varying dimensions of ideology become prominent according to the twists and turns of social struggle.

The social function of ideology, in this framework, is to serve as arena of struggle among competing social interests. In a society dominated by hegemonic interests, social movements arise as contending interests challenge the hegemonic power. Specific ideologies become the tools sharpened by those on each side in order to combat their opponents: anti-hegemonic ideologies make the case for reform or radical change; hegemonic ideologies make the case for reproduction of the established order.

Of particular interest, I think, are the dynamics of ideological evolution and interaction. My focus has been to trace the waves of social contestation that result from alliances of multiple social movements with each other, in search of social transformation that would be of benefit to each of them.<sup>2</sup> The role of ideology, in this case, becomes that of the discourse of alliance among social movements seeking to build a common, anti-hegemonic program. The simplifications of ideological formulations (e.g., “democracy,” “the 99 percent,” “civil society”), while frustratingly vague at times, may have the advantage of enabling more social movements to ally with each other at a moment of crisis.

The pressures for ideological change are manifold, and they come at once from within the semi-autonomous arena of ideology and from other elements of the social system that it works to represent. Within the world of ideology there is the struggle among the proponents of a given ideology for ensuring logic and consistency in their thinking and their program. More obvious is the dynamic of contestation among competing ideologies, which leads to tactical and even strategic shifts on each side. Further pressures for ideological change come from elements of the underlying social system (as with changing demography or political economy), change in scientific knowledge (as with biological evolution), change in technology (as with atomic energy or the internet), and change in human-natural interactions (as with climate change). The hierarchies present and evolving in the 19th century created distinctions by class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, and other factors. Ideology and the outcome of ideological struggle, in turn, can turn the tide of social change and bring transformations in the social system.

Wallerstein’s narrative, combining the trajectory of antisystemic movements and the concomitant ideological change of the 19th and 20th centuries, is clear and useful, up to and including his description of “Yalta,” the grand compromise of the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. Yet, for purposes here, there is a certain advantage into breaking this combined narrative into two tales, one tracing the rise and decline in political power of social movements, the other documenting the shifting character of their ideologies.

In his narrative of the relative power of antisystemic movements, Wallerstein narrates the increasing power of working-class movements up to a point that may be marked somewhere between 1914 and 1948, after which they gradually weakened. The movements for emancipation of slaves and other subject workers achieved major victories from the 1830s to 1880s, but became quiescent thereafter except at local levels in Africa and Asia. The anticolonial movement gained great strength from 1945 and sustained it until the 1970s. Movements of women for emancipation and equality and movements against racial discrimination have gained recognition as movements, though the material conditions of life still bring substantial discrimination by gender and race. Recent social movements have called for expanded democratic rights (especially 1989–92) and more broadly for the reduction of social inequality – with mixed results in each case.

The second narrative, the tale of shifting character in the ideology of these movements, is more difficult to tell in specific terms. The working-class movement relied on Marxian ideology and on anarchism, but also on pure-and-simple unionism; of these, Marxism was targeted and substantially weakened by hegemonic interests. Feminists relied on leading theorists in the 19th century; waves of feminism in the 20th century lionized key activists and theorists. Anticolonialism relied on such figures as Gandhi and Nkrumah. For anti-racist and environmental movements, ideology has seemed to rely more on broad social practice than on specific theorists. As I see it, the elements of ideology reflect scientific knowledge and other knowledge of society at many levels: literacy, media, science, technology, and patterns in social life all make their contributions. Somehow these elements are combined into relatively coherent sets of beliefs that can be labeled with concise phrases such as “free market,” “democracy,” “women’s liberation,” or “self-determination.” Ideology is then appropriated by contending social strata and their mobilizations, to be put in service of their social programs.

Turning now to the specifics of the four essays under comparison, they all address social movements and ideologies from the late 1980s up to the present. My chapter is the only one to give much attention to the worldwide movements calling in various ways for democratization from 1989 into the early 1990s. (One could, however, consider the Zapatista movement as an aftershock of 1989–1992.) These movements were especially a critique of arbitrary state power, and they were led by frustrated professionals, technocrats, and students – though they gained support of immense crowds of others. While the democratization movements brought down several states (of both left-wing and right-wing coloration)

their ideology proved vulnerable to neoliberalism. Calls for “democracy,” the critique of “impunity,” and the condemnation of state control of economic and social opportunity brought a long moment of remarkable mutual support by social movements around the world. Yet the imposition of brutal state power (by China in 1990, Iraq in 1991, and the United States in 1992) balanced the cases where states relented (in Europe, Africa, and Russia). In this mix, the individualistic rhetoric of neoliberalism absorbed much of the pro-democratic spirit.

Wolfson and Funke focus on the EZLN rebels of Chiapas from 1994, their anticolonial outlook and their sudden and adept adoption of internet technology to broaden and sustain their struggle. Their study of ideology argues that the Zapatistas implemented the “nomadic logic” articulated by Deleuze and Guattari – a logic that led to a “flattening” of leadership to ensure broader initiative. They describe the shift as associated with a nomadic meta-logic responding to changing political economy yet drawing on ancestral tradition.

Soborski concentrates primarily on the ideological response to the 2008 financial crisis. Using different terminology, he nonetheless describes shifts in ideology through reliance on networks, the notion of prefiguration, and “the 99 percent catchphrase,” all of which tended to decentralize leadership in attempts to improve decision-making, but which appeared in the short run to undermine unity.

Taken together, it seems to me, these points provide an opportunity for articulating a broad framework for analysis of ideological and social movements in the context of the global social system. While various writers naturally focus on specifics of interest, it would help to have a clearer statement of the overall framework. As I see it, the largest unit is the global social system as a whole, in its multiple dimensions. Within it we have those social interests and groups claiming hegemonies of various sorts, and the contending interests of others. Social movements arise and fall according to dynamics that are open to study. Ideology is developed and redeveloped as a tool of social movements, but it has a broader function as well, in articulating priorities for reproducing or transforming society. Soborski is ready to emphasize the agency of movement leaders in formulating ideology, while Wolfson and Funke give more attention to the shaping of movement ideology by larger forces. Wallerstein, looking forward as usual, has given us Davos and Porto Alegre as two principal paths for developing social programs.

This dialogue has focused on a distinction between the local histories of ideology and the histories of interacting ideologies and social movements. A final contrast among the four studies addresses the time frame of analysis in considering the interaction of social movements. The chapters by Soborski, Funke and Wolfson, and Manning all address the interaction of social movements – Manning in most detail – but all of them do so in time frames of a few years or up to two decades, while Wallerstein’s essay covers two centuries. The spaces that are left between these analyses suggest that it would be wise to study the place of

ideology in the interaction of social movements not only in brief periods, as has been done here, and not only across centuries, as by Wallerstein, but over the intermediate periods of decades and generations. Ideas, after all, do change with the generations.

## Notes

- 1 Immanuel Wallerstein, “Antisystemic Movements, Yesterday and Today,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 20(2) (2014): 158–172, ISSN 1076–156X. An abridged version of the article appears in this book.
- 2 Patrick Manning, “1789–1792 and 1989–1992. Global Interactions of Social Movements,” *World History Connected* 3(1) (2005) <http://worldhistoryconnected.org/3.1/manning.html/>.