Social Movements and International Relations: A Relational Framework

Abstract

Social movements are increasingly recognized as significant features of contemporary world politics, yet to date their treatment in international relations theory has tended to obfuscate the considerable diversity of these social formations, and the variegated interactions they may establish with state actors and different structures of world order. Highlighting the difficulties conventional liberal and critical approaches have in transcending conceptions of movements as moral entities, the article draws from two under-exploited literatures in the study of social movements in international relations, the English School and Social Systems Theory, to specify a wider range of analytical interactions between different categories of social movements and of world political structures. Moreover, by casting social movement phenomena as communications, the article opens international relations to consideration of the increasingly diverse trajectories and second-order effects produced by social movements as they interact with states, intergovernmental institutions, and transnational actors.

Keywords: social movements, ideology, international relations theory, systems theory, English School

Introduction

This article seeks to advance a new theoretical framework that enables consideration of the wide variety of social movement (SM) orientations and interactions in world politics, taking us beyond the progressive and emancipatory dimensions highlighted in much of the existing liberal, constructivist and critical scholarship in International Relations (IR). SM do not merely lobby for reforms or promote emancipatory politics, but can advance a vast array of different and often competing agendas while displaying an eclectic set of interactions with states, international organizations, and transnational actors. To assist in understanding this diversity of SM in world politics, we draw on two previously under-exploited theoretical approaches to examine social movements in IR – the English School (ES) and Luhmannian New Systems Theory. We use them to develop a relational framework that enables interrogation of the varied patterns of interaction, both direct and indirect, of SM with the layered and interconnected structures of world order. These world order structures consist of durable sets of expectations, shared understandings, and practices constituting and regulating the social relationships of actors across borders (Wendt, 1995: 73), which the ES disaggregates into interstate system, international society, and world society (Buzan, 2004: 7; Little, 1995).[1]

The argument is developed in three parts. The first provides a critique of the main existing schools of thought conceptualizing SM in IR theory, highlighting their limitations in capturing the diversity and dynamism of SM and their potential trajectories. Following this, the second and third parts of the article develop a new 'relational' theoretical framework that considers SM and their interactions with international political structures. The benefits of relational perspectives for the study of IR are increasingly being recognized, given the priority they give to interactional processes (McCourt, 2016). As Jackson and Nexon (1999: 292) have noted, a relational approach is especially helpful for developing theoretical perspectives on world politics that take into consideration 'areas which involve unit-change' beyond a state- and actor-centric focus, and we consider this can be extended to analyze dynamic and open phenomena such as SM.

In our framework, this is achieved by considering in turn insights from the ES and Luhmann's New Systems Theory, two approaches with recognized and complementary affinities (Buzan, 2010; Guzzini, 2004; Nexon, 2010). Thus, the second section disaggregates the diverse ideological orientations of SM in relation to the ES conceptual triad of international system, international society, and world society, offering a novel typology of interactions that avoids traditional progressivist assumptions.[2] In the third section, this relational typology is subsumed under a wider understanding of SM as communications, to account for the complex and simultaneous trajectories SM may follow as they intersect with diverse political actors, institutional domains, and structured social logics. Communications here are understood in line with Systems Theory as processes of reproduction and synthesis of information, utterance, and understanding; processes by which information is transformed into meaning (Luhmann, 1995: 145–148; Albert et al., 2008).

Two epistemological considerations should be noted. The article acknowledges that multiple definitions of SM exist in the scholarly literature (Della Porta, 1995: 3; Diani, 2003: 301; Kitschelt, 2006: 279; Tarrow, 2011a: 9; Tilly, 2004: 3). This article adopts a broad understanding that recognizes three common elements across these definitions: i) SM are networked social phenomena, held together by different forms of cooperation, recognition, and principally, communication; ii) they emerge and evolve relationally, exchanging material and symbolic resources with their environment; and iii) they publicly appeal to political authorities, directly or indirectly. In our view, this enables consideration of both formal 'SM actors' that may act as representatives of certain constituencies or as brokers with established organizations, as well as looser organizational forms where no specific actor is identifiable.

Second, the article builds on the ES tradition of methodological pluralism (Navari 2009). In line with ES practice, and in contrast to the positivist aim of hypothesis testing, this article aims to advance theory development by combining conceptual reasoning concerning the features of world politics with

illustrations drawn from a broad array of both past and present experience (Bull, 1966: 361; Buzan and Lawson, 2015). In the first section, the article discusses varieties of peace, nationalist, and environmental movements to elucidate the diverse ideological orientations of SM in relation to the three world order structures: interstate system, international society, and world society. In the second section, post-2010 movements including Occupy and digital campaigns which are more heterogeneous, dynamic, and ideologically plural than earlier SM, are used to illuminate a wider set of interactions. Diverse examples are thereby used to develop a new interpretive framework without claiming to suggest universal causal relationships (Hollis and Smith, 1990).

Traditional Perspectives on Social Movements in IR

Some of the dominant theoretical perspectives on IR have left limited to no scope for consideration of SM. The rationalist approaches that came to prominence in the Cold War era left little room for consideration of actors beyond the state in their parsimonious accounts of the functioning of the international system, given the primacy attributed to great powers, national interests, and foreign policy factors (Arts, 2000; Cutler, 2001; Johnston, 2001).[3] Thin constructivism such as Wendt's has similarly been accused of an 'unabashedly state-centric' perspective, despite its greater acknowledgement of the significance of ideas for international learning and change (Ferguson and Mansbach, 2004: 51).

The most explicit acknowledgment of civil society's role – and indirectly, of SM – proceeded from alternative liberal and constructivist perspectives, on the one hand, and from the critical, Marxist and feminist IR literatures, on the other. Each of these has served to illuminate different contributions of SM to global politics, albeit in accordance with contrasting intellectual traditions. The former adopt a distinctly regulatory and associational view of the contribution of civil society actors and SM to the international order, in accordance with the liberal project of domesticating international affairs (Price 2003; Marchetti

2017). Blossoming in the 1990s and early 2000s, liberal and constructivist perspectives linked civil society to globalization, democratization, and normative and cultural convergence, as social actors 'facilitating inter-state cooperation' and 'enhancing public participation' across borders, 'alongside states, IGOs, multinational corporations, and various mobilizing structures such as churches and labor' (Alger, 1997: 261, 268). At the time, some IR authors entered into direct conversation with the sociological subfield of social movement studies (particularly its North American political process theory variant), seeking to account for normative transformations in the post-Cold War period (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001; Joachim, 2003; Price, 1998, 2003; Risse and Sikkink, 1999; Tarrow, 2001), while subsequent elaborations on 'discursive' (Snow, 2004) and 'economic/industry' opportunity structures (Kapstein and Busby, 2016) have helped significantly in understanding the relationship social movements can establish with other societal spheres.[4] However, the lingering focus these analyses maintain on how social movement 'actors' strategically exploit opportunities tends to eschew the broader and often unintended reactions SM 'processes' can generate as they interact with the differentiated world order structures that are the focus of this article.

Neo-Marxist, critical, and feminist IR authors, on the other hand, have stressed the emancipatory potential of SM as transnational forces counterbalancing the technocratic, economistic, patriarchal and hegemonic character of neo-liberal globalization and the classist and gendered orientation of world political institutions (Colás, 2002; Dunford, 2015; Eschle, 2001; Escobar, 2004; Whitaker, 2004). In this literature, the progressive contribution of SM follows not from the regulatory potential attributed to civil associations and advocacy networks, but from the emancipatory capacity movements are purported to have as agents of normative change (Eschle and Maiguashca 2007), their contribution to symbolic 'processes of revolt and opposition' (Germain and Kenny, 2005: 8), and the provision of 'models for building an alternative, more directly democratic and globally connected society' (Juris, 2004: 345). Against the liberal and constructivist

focus on state-IGO-NGO collaborations and international norms, this second body of literature emphasizes the activities and discourses advanced by grassroots movements in the periphery of the international order, such as new class-based movements in the global South and global justice struggles driven by alternative visions of the global commons, illustrated by those flourishing at the turn of the millennium (Glasius and Pleyers 2013; Petras and Veltmeyer 2011; Rupert 2003).

As noted by Chandler (2004), despite their differences, both sets of literature display 'Habermasian' influences – where civil society mobilization contributes either to promoting universal values and democratizing international institutions, or to generating emancipatory alternatives to the pathologies of modern society. Thus, while liberal and constructivist perspectives illuminate the way in which non-state actors associate with and influence the agendas of international organizations and states, critical scholars have explored symbolic aspects of social movement action, and the challenge they present to embedded ideologies and norms. However, in the context of the protest movements surging in the 2010s, characterized by more personalized and networked dynamics, a tendency towards anti-institutionalism, and the expansion of illiberal political values, the deficits of conventional actor-centric associational models and discursive-emancipatory conceptions have become more evident (Bennett, 2012; Castells, 2015; Davies et al., 2016; Gerbaudo, 2017). For Krastev (2014), for example, contemporary protest movements abandon the two basic ideals sustaining liberal and critical political projects – political reformism and revolution – as protesters may neither aspire to capture state power nor accept the gradualism of institutional politics, often rejecting democratic mechanisms as well as traditional issue-based movement identities. Moreover, the complex linkages contemporary social movements develop with social media, anti-establishment values, and challenger political actors unsettles the associational and solidarist logics grounding liberal and critical positions, with numerous authors noting the synergies these movements have with 'protest populism', democratic destabilization processes, and ethno-nationalist conflict (Beissinger, 2013; Kriesi, 2014).

Recent literature has recognized situations of 'norm regress' (Heller and Kahl, 2013; McKeown, 2009; Panke and Petersohn, 2012), the limitations of NGOs and their often organic relations with the state system (Cooley and Ron, 2002; Dupuy et al., 2015; Prakash and Gugerty, 2010), the similarities between social movement strategies and those of corporate and state actors (Busby and Greenhill, 2015; Sell and Prakash, 2004), and the international activities of illiberal, exclusive, and reactionary SM and civil society actors (Blee, 2002; Bob, 2012; Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler, 2016).[5] However, many IR analyses still depart from progressive assumptions regarding SM goals, values, and identities. Liberal and constructivist IR literature has shown a marked bias towards 'good norms that worked' (Price, 2008: 193), while the critical scholarship has admitted a pervasive tendency towards broad principles of emancipatory politics at the expense of attention to specific agents of emancipatory change (Dunford, 2015: 242; Voss and Williams, 2012). Discussions of SM in IR often remain embedded within aggregate treatments of SM as part of totalizing categories, be these global civil society (Wapner and Kantel 2017), the global public domain (Fraser, 2014; Ruggie, 2004), globalization from below (Kostovicova and Glasius, 2011), or global democracy (Smith, 2008): these treatments overplay the potential of SM to bring about change (Davies, 2014; Lynch, 2011), minimize their role in unexpected and negative developments (West, 2013: 23–25; Weyland, 2012), and generally obfuscate the complex trajectories that may follow from the interaction of different types of SM with an international environment populated by ubiquitous, powerful, and 'ruthlessly instrumental actors' (Price, 2008: 201), authoritative institutions, and competing collective identities and values.[6]

In short, an expanding body of evidence outside or at the boundaries of the IR canon indicates that SM can play more diverse roles in international politics beyond promoting liberal norms and/or emancipatory struggles, not only as they may advance exclusive, statist, or reactionary objectives, but as the forms they assume as political processes, and their eventual consequences, are conditioned by first and

second-order interactions with and between other actors and structures. While resolving all these issues escapes the possibilities of this article, and while acknowledging the contributions of constructivist and critical approaches, the next section proposes a relational framework that can analytically encompass the diverse ideological orientations of SM, different patterns of interaction with world political structures, and a wider array of eventual SM trajectories and effects. The framework proposed takes us significantly beyond the more conventional actor-centric focus on frames and strategies, and on their compatibility with the structures of political opportunities and the market, factors that have largely been used to explain the short-term impact of specific social movements in promoting particular policy changes. Rather, by combining relational ideas in IR, ES insights, and social system theory, the article unpacks the wider trajectories SM and movement episodes can follow when interacting with over-arching world order structures.

As Nexon (2010: 119) has highlighted, despite their attention to structures, ES and Luhmannian perspectives have much in common with a relational agenda, as well as with each other, on account of their versatility in enabling consideration of interactions and processes respectively. Although authors including Andersen (2015: 52) have drawn attention to the relevance of relational perspectives for understanding non-governmental actors, given the limits dominant IR theories have in handling units whose boundaries and institutional forms are open and heterogeneous, existing literature has yet to delineate the array of potential interactions of SM in IR in a systematic manner, with relational forms of analysis to date largely confined to the study of interactions among states and international organizations (Adler and Pouliot, 2011; Duque, 2018; Qin, 2016). In the sections ahead we combine ES and Luhmannian insights to develop a relational approach to understanding social movements in world politics: first we use the ES to outline a typology of social movement ideologies and their interaction with world order structures missing from other IR perspectives, and then we integrate this typology with insights from the Luhmannian systems theory

approach, to delineate a general framework that captures SM phenomena that do not conform to traditional definitions and categories.

Social Movements and World Order Structures

An advantage of ES theory, particularly in its more recent variants, is that it offers a parsimonious but variegated conceptualization of the ordering structures, principal institutions, and general patterns of interaction 'which comprise the subject matter of international relations' (Wight, 1992: 6). In particular, ES literature provides us with a typology of over-arching world order structures that takes us far beyond the narrowly context-specific (and largely national) political opportunities that have been the traditional focus in social movement research. If we are interested in the positioning of social movements in international relations, rather than their narrow policy outcomes, then it is these broader structures that are of concern. As Little (1995: 15) noted, the ES emphasizes three parallel structures, each of which operates alongside one another and none of which has ontological priority: these are the anarchic interstate system, the intergovernmental institutions of international society, and the shared interhuman values and solidarities of world society. While earlier ES literature focused primarily on the interface between a (realist) interstate system and the (institutional-normative) society of states, recent ES scholars have paid greater attention to world society, the domain of interhuman solidarities and shared identities where civil society and SM are traditionally located, as depicted in figure 1 (Buzan, 2018; Buzan and Lawson, 2015; Stroikos, 2018). Furthermore, in considering world society's interactions with the two other domains, analyses inspired by these ideas have started to address the dynamic relationship between local and transnational non-state actors with states, international organizations, and other social institutions, while avoiding teleological and progressivist assumptions about a world society that 'seldom speaks with a single voice' (Clark, 2007: 214). This ES conception of world society eschews the progressivist assumptions of alternative understandings

such as that of the Stanford School: as Navari (2018: 15,18) notes, whereas the Stanford School conception assumes universalizing and homogenizing processes, the ES conception offers scope for multiple pathways to be taken and 'leaves the question of its content open to the vagaries of different social processes'.

[Insert figure 1 approximately here]

Building on these efforts, this article advances a new framework for understanding SM in IR by bridging the ES disaggregation of interstate system, international society, and world society structures with a typological approach that unpacks the diverse ideological orientations of SM and their factions. To do so, we adapt Ceadel's (1987, 2000) typological approach to the ideologies of peace and war movements, which he considered not as pressure groups advocating for policy and regulatory changes, but as 'ideological protagonists' promoting a broad range of international political ideologies requiring disaggregation (Ceadel 2000: 6). Ceadel (1987) highlights how these movements include not only pacifist and pacificist positions – the former advocating the unconditional repudiation of war, the latter accepting the conditional use of force while calling for preventive institutional mechanisms – but also defencist, militarist and 'crusading' ideologies, according to different and often opposing perspectives on the behavior of states, existing institutional arrangements, and/or normative priorities. This approach has the advantage of considering SM in relative ideological terms, and can be adapted to the study of SM more generally by considering the ideological orientations of SM towards the tripartite and interdependent structures of world order considered by the ES: the interstate system, international society, and world society. As depicted in figure 2, we adopt Wight's (1992) classical terminology of three traditions of international theory that distinguishes between 'realist', 'rationalist', and 'revolutionist' approaches, which emphasize respectively

inter-state distinctions and interests, the institutions and norms of international society, and the inter-human solidarities of world society.

[Insert figure 2 approximately here]

Participants in SM may embrace realist ideologies and goals insofar as they seek to preserve the existing state-based order and associated identities, suppress challengers to that order, work in cooperation with established state institutions, and inhibit change in the international system. Realism as an ideology in this sense corresponds to established usage of the term in the ES,[7] but differs from other uses such as the state-centric ontology of neorealism.[8] Factions of SM promoting realist ideology have been primarily oriented to the state rather than transnational: realist components of nationalist movements, for instance, are oriented towards preservation and/or promotion of conceptions of national identity aligned to state-centric institutions (Cobban, 1969) – an example is provided by Loyalist groups in Northern Ireland that perceived their role as to 'protect the state from perceived enemies' (Vertigans, 2008: 71). However, there are also realist factions among movements concerned with goals that are traditionally perceived to cross borders, such as peace and environmentalism. Among the former, a realist perspective is put forward by 'defence-ists' that seek to work in conjunction with states to promote peace through preservation of the balance of power among states (Ceadel, 1987): Badruddin (2003: 13) notes this as one of the perspectives among movements aiming for peace in the Cold War. Among environmentalists, a recent example of a realist faction is the 'New Ecology' project in France, a movement defined by one of its leaders as 'based on national interest' (quoted in Nelsen, 2014) and which is oriented to the interstate system in that it sees the solutions to environmental problems as lying within the boundaries of states, and is aimed towards state

system preservation in that it sees environmentalist goals such as buying locally sourced goods as facilitative of maintaining the pre-eminence of the state.

At the other extreme, revolutionary components of SM seek to transform the existing order or even replace it with an alternative one, through altering fundamental social identities, norms, and institutionalized patterns of interaction. In contrast to the state-centric orientation of 'realist' movements, revolutionary movements are usually oriented more to the transnational and inter-human domain. Among peace movements, for instance, revolutionary pacifists seek to promote the radical objective of a world without war or armed forces, using methods such as conscientious objection (Early, 1995): War Resisters' International, for instance, was established by conscientious objectors declaring war to be 'a crime against humanity' and committing 'not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war' (quoted in Bennett and Howlett 2014: 345). Among nationalist movements, by contrast, one strand of revolutionary nationalists seek to replace the existing multi-national order with one advancing the interests of a single nation, and may use revolutionary violence to advance it: an historical example is the Pan-German League, which pursued German expansion at the expense of other states (Eley, 1991: 48).[9] A further contrasting example may be found in the environmentalist movement: radical 'deep ecologists' can be considered revolutionist in that they favor the replacement of the modern institutions of the state system and international society by those supportive of alternative 'pre-industrial' ways of living (Drengson and Inoue, 1995).

In between the realist and revolutionist extremes are elements of SM that seek to work within – rather than overthrowing – the existing order (unlike revolutionists), but which seek to reform it, rather than preserve it (unlike realists). We use Wight's term 'rationalist' in relation to this approach, given its focus on working within the confines of existing institutions of international society to advance incremental rather than revolutionary changes in line with Wight's (1992) conception.[10] In contrast to the national orientation

of ‘realist’ movements and the transnational orientation of revolutionists, ‘rationalist’ mobilizations are oriented towards international society and often mirror its practices such as through adopting international federal structures of mobilization. As an example within this perspective, among peace movements pacific-ists seek to reform the existing order by promoting reforms such as strengthened intergovernmental institutions, and have adopted international federal structures such as the International Federation of League of Nations Societies and the World Federation of United Nations Associations (Ceadel, 1987). Among nationalist movements, on the other hand, reformist nationalists may seek incremental changes perceived to enhance a nation’s independence, such as promotion of Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union (Usherwood and Startin, 2013).

Reformist transnational coalitions and advocacy networks promoting international norms usually involve collaborations between akin outsider and insider actors in governments, international organizations, and international and local NGOs (Price, 2003): among environmentalist movements, for example, such collaborations were influential in the setting of Agenda 21 at the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 (Morphet, 1996). Solidarist coalitions such as this are formed around particular configurations of shared values, corresponding to the ‘gemeinschaft’ approach to understanding society by which social actors with a common standpoint form shared institutions (Buzan, 1993: 333). Pluralist coalitions, on the other hand, are formed among groups from diverse perspectives which through their mutual interactions come to identify common objectives, corresponding to a ‘gesellschaft’ understanding of a plural international society based on mutual interactions and exchanges (Buzan, 1993: 334). For example, van Dyke and Amos (2017) have highlighted the role of interactions in SM coalition formation, with the World Social Forum process having facilitated interactions that led to new coalitions of previously disparate groups.

In elaborating the typology of realist, revolutionist, and rationalist perspectives, we have disaggregated an array of SM orientations that are commonly overlooked in existing liberal and critical

literatures on SM in IR. Moreover, having disaggregated the orientations of ideologies among SM, we have a basis for interrogating further their prospective interactions with the world societal, international societal, and interstate structures configuring world order. Whereas the interstate structure comprises an ontology of states with their competing interests in an anarchical international system, international society comprises the shared norms and institutions established among states, and world society the values and identities of individuals and transnational actors (Buzan 2014, 12-13). At the most general level, therefore, the interactions between SM and world order structures may be understood in terms of the alignment of SM ideologies with the state interests and identities of the interstate system, the international norms and institutions of international society, and the collective values and solidarities of world society, respectively. The greater the alignment, the more harmonious the interaction may be expected to be (and vice versa). For instance, rationalist movements' claims are expected to resonate more with institutions of international society than those of radical counter-hegemonic movements (Nagel, 2005). We have seen many successful examples of reformist SM influencing international society, with recent examples among peace movements including the campaigns for conventions addressing landmines and cluster munitions, where successful collaborations were undertaken between movements and sympathetic actors in international society (Bolton and Nash, 2010). Revolutionist movements, by contrast, may be expected to promote interhuman forms of solidarity with other world society groups, but their interactions with 'realist' actors and movements are likely to be more problematic (Hermann, 1992): for instance, Armstrong (1992)'s analysis of revolutionist movements targeting states – such as the Russian and Iranian revolutions – highlighted the success of the state system in containing these revolutions and ensuring that the states in which these revolutions took place were ultimately to pursue 'realist' foreign policy objectives such as the balance of power.

In sum, when the three SM orientations (realist, rationalist, and revolutionist) are intersected with the three ES world order domains (international system, international society, and world society), a typology of nine prospective interactions results, as presented in figure 3.

[Insert figure 3 approximately here]

Figure 3 points to a primary form of prospective interaction along the diagonal axis (cells 1, 2, and 3), understood in terms of the potential for collaboration (though not necessarily agreement) resulting from the alignment of SM ideologies with the basic institutions of the corresponding domain of world order, whereas patterns of negotiation are anticipated in the intermediate cells (4, 5, 6, and 7), and nationalist-cosmopolitan antagonism are expected at the extreme ends (cells 8 and 9).

In this perspective, realist movements, such as those nationalists that aim to defend existing states' sovereignty, are expected to collaborate with states given their ideological standpoint focused on preservation of sovereign-oriented norms and values (cell 1), while revolutionist movements are anticipated to cooperate with actors in world society (cell 3), insofar as they prioritize interhuman norms and values over the state system. A notable example of the former in the contemporary era is state support for nationalist movements in Eastern Europe (Polyakova, 2014), while the latter is illustrated by the manner in which actors engaged in 'prefigurative politics' in Occupy mobilizations mobilized diverse groups in world society (Fuchs, 2014). In the center (cell 2), rationalist movements and international society are expected to collaborate in reforms to the existing order, as noted in case of action against landmines (Bolton and Nash, 2010).

At the extremes, realist movements are anticipated to have antagonistic relations with cosmopolitan world society actors (cell 9), while revolutionist movements are expected to engage in conflictual relations

with the interstate system (cell 8). As an example of the latter, the Occupy mobilizations faced a common antagonistic response from liberal and illiberal states alike in clearing them, in contrast to these mobilizations' achievements in world society (Krastev 2014, 72), while the relationship identified in cell 9 is illustrated by the frequent organization of counter-demonstrations to nationalist mobilizations by a diverse array of cosmopolitan world society actors (Copsey, 2016).

In the intermediate position, contrasting forms of negotiation are anticipated, depending on whether these are more state-centric and therefore 'pluralist' (cells 4 and 5), or more interhuman and therefore 'solidarist' (cells 6 and 7). As elaborated in Buzan (2004, 2018), the interface between different world order domains is mediated by distinct but overlapping logics, more interhuman and solidarity driven for world society, and more pluralist and interest driven for the interstate system. In Figure 3, therefore, realist movements and international society institutions (cell 5) – and rationalist movements and the interstate system (cell 4) – are expected to undertake pluralist negotiations in recognition of national differences, while interactions of international society with revolutionist movements (cell 6) - and of rationalist movements with world society (cell 7) – may involve more solidarist negotiations drawing on shared values (Williams, 2005). Among nationalist movements, for example, realist nationalists have negotiated with international society with reference to state-centric international norms such as sovereignty, whereas revolutionary macro-nationalists have appealed more to cross-border solidarities such as religious or ethno-linguistic identification (e.g. Pan-Slavism and Arab nationalism) (Snyder, 1984).

Where movements involve diverse factions – realist, rationalist, and revolutionist – figure 3 captures prospective interactions with respect to factions from each approach: there is a frequent contrast between the reception of reformist and revolutionary wings of movements, with the former more likely to gain access to international society while the latter is suppressed, as found for instance in the case of anti-apartheid activism in South Africa (Goodwin, 2001: 298).

It is important to take into account that the potential indicated in figure 3 for cooperation and negotiation does not preclude conflict as interactions can also result in antagonism due to, for example, the clash of incommensurable SM ideologies and world society identities (e.g. LQBTI movements in religious fundamentalist societies), or the breakdown of exchanges or splits between more revolutionist and rationalist actors and factions: Dunford (2017), for instance, points to the problems of communication emerging when grassroots groups in the food sovereignty movement worked with elite UN actors to launch a joint declaration on the rights of peasants and rural working people. Furthermore, under certain circumstances, the anticipated relationships may differ, since states, international institutions, and movements often involve a spectrum of ideological positions and factions and may prioritize other factors and strategies. For example, state actors may interact cooperatively with revolutionist movements in world society, on the basis of general common principles, as was witnessed in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution (Weiss, 2017) and in the support certain Muslim-majority states have provided for Islamic militant groups, or of shared strategic goals, as in the US backing of radical Islamic *mujahedin* during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Similarly, pro-democracy movements and liberal international organizations may collaborate with nationalist or extremist groups to pursue reformist goals on the basis of different tactical and ideological affinities, as occurred during some of the 'color revolutions' in Eastern Europe (Beissinger, 2013).

The ES framework set out so far helps us to understand the prospective relationships between SM and world order structures in a manner that takes into consideration the varied orientation of movement ideologies without presupposing their progressive normative function. In doing this, it has also underlined the need to pay attention to more complex relational scenarios that follow from considering that interactions can occur simultaneously, as particular movement claims and actions can resonate with multiple world political institutions, as well as indirectly, escaping the intentions and plans of activists. A relational

approach further needs to take into consideration that SM develop their ideological position and mobilizing repertoires over time, as part of interactive processes with outsider actors and changing external factors, and that some SM formations may lack a clear ideological position (e.g. Occupy). To account for these relational possibilities and effects, it is necessary to move our model 'upwards' and to engage with SM from a broader systemic perspective. As the next section will highlight, this is possible if the interactions between SM and world political institutions are conceived primarily as communicational processes rather than as strategic exchanges between actors.

From Strategies to Communications

The recent wave of protest movements offers an empirical counterpoint to expand the previous model of structured interactions and situate it within a wider relational framework. This is because if one accepts claims that some of the new 'We are here' movements, as Tarrow (2011b) referred to Occupy-like experiences, differ from previous ones in their lack of clear policy demands, stable ideologies, and even representational character, then it is necessary to take a step back from models that take coherent goal-oriented features as a starting point of analysis. Moreover, as many of these movements have enjoyed a 'global' public visibility that arguably surpasses any form of direct policy impact, many authors have highlighted the need to address second and third order forms of influence, such as the introduction of new repertoires and vocabularies into the public domain, or the signaling effect of contentious actions (Calhoun, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2017).

All these considerations may be accounted for by integrating the previous ES ideas with Social Systems Theory, a sociological perspective with growing application in IR that moves away from a conception of world society whereby societal integration takes place via common goods and shared values, to a conception premised on the opposing notion of differentiation (Buzan and Albert, 2010; Peña, 2015).[11]

This paradigm is fundamentally represented by the theory of Luhmann, who through the seventies and eighties was engaged in a long intellectual debate with Habermas.[12] In Luhmann's theory, world society is not considered an extrinsic domain of 'lifeworld-like' solidarities, but rather a semantic network reproduced by the constant circulation of communications generated by specialized social systems and sub-systems – such as politics, the economy, and science, among others – structurally coupled with each other. The functional differentiation of these systems, where each 'sees' the world differently, is what enables a highly complex modern society to operate without requiring either normative agreement or instrumental coherence (Luhmann, 1994, 2008).

The relevance of this paradigm for this article is that it abandons the notion of a fundamental civil society sphere laying outside or in opposition to instrumental systems, and with it, much of the normative teleology supporting IR constructivist and critical approaches to SM, as explained in the first section (Blühdorn, 1999: 188; King and Thornhill, 2003: 95).[13] Luhmann proposed a non-essentialist and relational conception of SM where these were not part of civil society by default, nor were they necessarily representative of an extrinsic lifeworld community.[14] Rather, SM claims and actions are conceived as oppositional communications (which he referred to as 'irritations') produced by 'non-differentiated general publics', which may assume a political orientation or not (Luhmann, 2013: 163). While Luhmann remained highly skeptical of SM's emancipatory value,[15] his theory underlines the notion that as communications, SM are not in control of the symbolic effects they cause, nor are their normative orientation and strategies sufficient to understand the trajectory their actions may assume as they circulate within and across the differentiated structures of world society, as '…what matters is not who is right: what matters is the form in which this sort of resistance to communication introduces reality into communication and continues to take effect in it' (Luhmann, 2013: 164–165).

This conception of SM as communications may be bridged with the expanding literature viewing contentious phenomena as 'signals' that external actors and audiences listen to and decode differently.[16] Domestically, protests have been noted to provide outsiders (i.e. elites, political parties, challengers) with information about the type and level of social grievances, the commitment of certain groups to certain objectives, and the stability or popularity of authorities (Sevenans et al., 2016; Wouters and Walgrave, 2017). Others have explored how social movement repertoires are observed across borders, by states and international organizations guided by different interests and logics (Busby, 2010; Chen Weiss, 2013; McKoy and Miller, 2012; Shannon et al., 2015). For example, discussions of the adoption of non-violent strategies by rebel movements have considered how these may elicit more sympathetic responses from the international community, are more appealing to the mass public, and are less threatening to incumbent elites (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008: 12–13). There has also been renewed interest in the socio-heuristic mechanisms mediating the diffusion of norm-promoting campaigns and protest cycles, pointing to complex chains linking stimulus, medium, and social agents, and to the role of 'firewalls' and conductors deterring or enabling the circulation of information across territorial boundaries and scalar levels (Gunitsky, 2014; Miller et al., 2018; Solingen, 2012). The framework set out here is able to encompass all these aspects.

As represented in figure 4 below, from a Systems Theory perspective, SM communications are no longer understood as originating beyond or below the political domain, but rather deep-seated *in between* world order structures interconnected with each other. The ideological and normative orientation of a given SM actor, faction or episode, if present, represents then one among many aspects at play in the decoding and circulation processes of a SM signal in between interstate, international society, and world society domains, processes that include first as well as second-order interactions (the solid and dotted arrows, respectively).

[Insert figure 4 approximately here]

In contrast to totalizing, progressivist, and locational treatments of SM and civil society, this approach recognizes that as communications, SM signals can translate very differently from the original aims and intentions of their proponents, as they may be (re)shaped or even displaced by second-order interactions unfolding beyond the intention, control, and even awareness of SM actors. As indicated by Busby (2010: 7), 'some things are in the control of advocates – the agents – but whether or not advocates succeed is mediated by the context, the nature of the issue, what else is going in the world, which agencies and international organizations have a say in the problem, and so on'. On this basis, our proposal is that because of this semantic openness, all SM events could, in principle, be decoded in 'realist' terms when entering the interstate system (for instance, by being perceived as aligned with or opposed to state interests or national identities), as 'rationalist' messages if resonating with relevant international institutions and norms, and as 'revolutionist' signals if appealing to interhuman values and solidarities. The relative strength of these different decodings may vary not only due to the characteristics of the emitter and the message (the SM actors, their frames, and demands), but also due to those of the receiving audiences. Thus, some SM, such as pro-democracy or human rights movements, may be resonant in relation to multiple world order structures in that they strongly reverberate with the interests/identities of influential states, recognized international norms, and widespread human values. Others, such as the global justice movement, have had comparatively limited institutional and interstate resonance, and their symbolic effects have been significant primarily in relation to the interhuman domain. Yet others may have minimal significance in relation to any domain, such as some of the Occupy experiences that beyond initial novelty and localized disruption seem not to have produced lasting institutional and world societal reactions.

This framework thereby reaffirms public visibility, and communicability as fundamental dimensions of SM processes. While already in his classic definition Tilly (2004: 3) stated that SM involve *public* campaigns and 'concerted public representations of WUNC: worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment', the communicational approach put forward here is better positioned to conceptualize the growing relevance of the link existing between SM action and globalized media technologies. In the early nineties Luhmann noted the building of a 'covert alliance' between protest movements and the mass-media, considering that this generated pseudo-events '[…] produced from the outset to be reported and that would not take place at all if it were not for the mass media' (Luhmann, 2013: 158, 163). More recently (and optimistically), scholars such as Castells (2008: 90) have taken this idea further, arguing that civil society has gained '[…] the means to exist independently from political institutions and the mass media', as the new global public sphere no longer revolves around territorially-bounded institutions but around new media of mass self-communication.[17] By considering both direct and indirect interactions – associational, contentious, and heuristic – as constitutive of an expanded multi-scalar socio-political process, our model opens up an array of complex analytical SM trajectories, depending on the prevalence and/or combination of multiple signaling pathways, as represented in figure 4.

For example, while a conventional argument poses that SM and NGOs influence foreign policy by reconciling the instrumental assessments of elites with wider normative concerns, in this model this constitutes just one potential direction of travel of SM signals and the responses they may elicit. The Arab Spring and the Ukrainian Maidan provide illustrations in this regard. Leaving aside the ideological orientation of core SM actors, these movements were decoded in international society as struggles against corrupt and authoritarian elites, and akin 'rationalist' factions were supported. In the interstate system, by contrast, they were read as 'realist' geopolitical threats and/or opportunities, more or less urgent, affecting the balance of power in the region, so states intervened (and failed to intervene) in line with these

interpretations. Civil society groups at the local and regional level, often observing these events through social media, responded according to ethno-religious and nationalist identities, and shared values. The results were unexpected patterns of diffusion and divergent trajectories of collaboration and antagonism between different international actors and social groups (Beissinger, 2017; Weyland, 2012). In time, the intersection of these processes altered the positioning and strategies of the actors involved, the level of the struggles, and the political significance of each episode. In the proposed framework these different trajectories are not stable features defined by grievances, goals, or political opportunity structures, but relational outcomes that need accounting for in terms of the ecology of factors at play in the emergence and reproduction of SM communications.[18] This approach has a number of advantages. First, the framework enables a more nuanced treatment of the reach of social movements, whereby transnationality is no longer associated with shared structural links (grievances, identities, frames) or stable chains of actors collaborating across borders, but with broader semantic and symbolic processes by which movement events travel, influence other social actors, and intertwine with wider processes across space and time. Through these processes, some initially localized movements may produce significant cross-border repercussions, as witnessed in the 2011 Arab uprisings, while others may remain domestic or community-level events. Second, the framework is able to encompass the diffuse effects and character of contemporary horizontal movements and web-based mobilizations, such as the campaigns of online activist network Avaaz and the clandestine activities of hacktivist group Anonymous, which derive their power from the curation and distribution of information and the provision of connective resources rather than from their organizational homogeneity, their framing coherence, or the durability of associational bonds, and are therefore especially suitable to consideration as decentered communications (Bennett et al., 2014; Kavada, 2012).

While this conceptual model is not geared towards generating hypotheses to be tested in positivist terms, the ideas proposed can assist a more systematic understanding of complex social and political

phenomena and inform process tracing and causal process observations. Thus, at any given point in time, the model considers the external repercussions and the international political visibility acquired by a SM event, and accounts for this visibility by evaluating alternative direct and indirect interactive processes. For example, a SM phenomenon such as the Occupy protests in New York, which led to a world-wide wave of similar demonstrations but failed to generate major institutional effects, suggests a trajectory where the state system and international society were not receptive to movement signals (as anticipated in the framework given the lack of resonance of the movement's revolutionist claims among the principal institutions in these two domains), and where circulation proceeded mostly through world society channels (i.e. via the media). As neither international society institutions nor state system structures were openly threatened by movement claims and repertoires, secondary effects at this level could be expected to remain limited. This trajectory helps us to understand the movement's relatively high visibility in the media despite rather localized expressions. The #MeToo movement shares many similarities in this regard, but its signals resonate not only with ingrained world societal values and mobilized grievances (at least in parts of the Western world), but with established international principles, enabling greater space for solidarities and supporting coalitions to emerge across world order domains. However, since the state system is not a direct target and since core state institutions are not threatened by the movement's ideology, reactions at this level can be expected not to be significant (although they could be in places where feminist values clash directly with state identities). On the other hand, the activities of European movements against immigration, due to its ethno-nationalist character, can be expected to resonate not only with the identities of influential state actors (i.e. political elites, parties), but also with logics embedded in the highly-securitized post-9/11 international community. As a result, secondary communications between the state system, the international society, and world society are expected to amplify and even reinforce movement signals, as national identities, security concerns, and regional and international norms collide.[19]

The proposal of approaching movements as relational, dynamic, and complex socio-communicational phenomena rather than as predefined collective actors with stable identities, strategies, and goals, opens IR theorizations to a more sensitive understanding of the processes of construction of SM as international political variables, while keeping in sight the differentiated, layered, and powerful structures configuring the world political order (Buzan and Albert, 2010). Informed by analyses concerning the origins, strategies, and evolution of SM, IR and social movement scholars would be in a much better position to hypothesize and critically examine the socio-heuristic and socio-political processes by which diverse SM forms and episodes may be rendered significant for international affairs, the trajectories and conflicts that may emerge from these renderings, and the extent to which these trajectories and conflicts shape the behavior and decision-making of governments, elites, and civil society actors, both domestically and across borders.

Conclusion

This article has responded to the limitations of traditional liberal and critical discussions of SM in IR that have too often been circumscribed by teleological assumptions with respect to the role of SM in countering the excesses and exclusions at play in international politics. Since SM rarely coincide with the reductive categories through which social action is generally schematized, we have put forward an alternative relational framework for understanding SM in world politics. SM include multiple reactionary, nationalist, fundamentalist, and exclusionary movements which do not easily fit traditional progressivist assumptions. Moreover, some contemporary SM expressions do not fit classical collective actor formats with clear identities, interests, and organizational boundaries, and they do not necessarily advance coherent grievances, policy demands, or moral messages. Social and protest movements can be both democratic and nationalist (as in many recent color revolutions and secessionist movements), anti-regime and conservative

(such as recent middle-class protests in South America), radical and liberal (libertarianism, feminism), counter-hegemonic and exclusive (religious fundamentalism), pro-market and nationalist (Brexit), or pro-European and nativist (many European right-wing movements).

IR theorization needs to widen its scope beyond the participation of local movements in global advocacy networks or the transnational discourses stemming from a diffuse global civil society. This article has provided a way forward by drawing from ES and Luhmannian approaches. Through the ES's elegant framework, the article has elaborated the wider range of interactional analytical possibilities through a typology of social movement ideologies. This has two advantages. First, it avoids axiomatically assuming SM to be representatives of a progressive world (civil) society. Second, it specifies how movements that invoke and articulate different visions of world order (figure 2) may interact with existing structures in that world order to produce conflictual, complementary, and intermediate alignments between movements and institutions (figure 3). With reference to Luhmannian Systems Theory, the article incorporates this sub-set of interactions within a wider paradigm of movements as social communications (figure 4). This paradigm has significant theoretical and analytical potential, as it can incorporate strategic views about SM framing, messaging, or signaling as found in sociological literature within a more comprehensive understanding of the structuring of world society as a complex 'social whole', and enables a more nuanced discussion of the processes by which SM phenomena 'plug into' a world order that is structurally differentiated and communicationally interrelated (Albert and Buzan, 2013: 133).

The framework also points to further potential pathways of interaction and circulation beyond states, international organizations, and civil society actors, such as the coupling of SM with media technologies, which has become increasingly relevant to understand how contentious events circulate in society and across borders. The framework may also be used to consider the effects SM may cause on other social systems beyond the political, such as science, art, and religion, for example, and their role in re-

orienting scientific priorities (e.g. environmentalism and global warming, pacificism and nuclear science), generating new artistic expressions and trends (e.g. revolutionary movements and vanguardism), or altering religious beliefs (e.g. religious fundamentalism and reformism). In light of this, questions regarding the regulatory or emancipatory consequences of movements may fall under an alternative set of systemic considerations, such as: How are movements crafted as events of political and symbolic significance? How are certain movement events assigned a location in the world order? Who translates movement signals in different world orders and institutional environments? How are these translations enacted in these orders and environments? What institutional and structural factors shape the spatial and temporal trajectories SM follow when entering the world system? How (and where) may different relational trajectories interact?

This sort of questioning would enable bridging the study of SM with recent theoretical debates in IR whereby familiar individual, territorial, and/or normative-legalistic categories are being revised in light of practice, socio-technical, and 'non-human' paradigms (Barry, 2013; Bueger, 2015; Read et al., 2016). IR's engagement with SM and analyses of their outcomes and contributions to political change and order, could take a more encompassing turn, less certain and optimistic perhaps, but more sensitive to the complex interactions between social rationalities, world order structures, and epistemic processes.

11994 words

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Notes

[1] Wendt's definition of structure provided here is the one taken forward by ES scholars such as Buzan (2004: 14) when outlining international society, international system, and world society.

[2] Institutions are defined as durable and structured set of practices and rules constitutive of political actors, such as states and international organizations, and their legitimate patterns of activity and interaction (Buzan 2005, 167).

[3] Waltzian structuralism directly aimed to protect the epistemology of IR from 'the autonomous influence of democracy, ideology, economic integration, law, and institutions on world politics' (Legro and Moravcsik, 1999: 6). Institutionalists such as Drezner (2007: 21) consider that civil society scholarship confuses visibility with causal effects, overstating the secondary role of civil society actors in processes of international coordination.

[4] So that 'whereas IR theorists talk of norms, social movement theorists tend to talk of collective or shared beliefs' (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001: 409). It must be noted that the process theory school is skeptical about the possibility of truly transnational social movements to emerge, given that core mechanisms behind collective action are considered context-specific and situated (Khagram et al., 2002: 13).

[5] Aware of this, Habermas posed the awkward distinction between 'defensive' and 'offensive' movements (Ray, 1993: 58).

[6] Instead, among political sociologists the question of social movement outcomes has produced conceptual and methodological debates that hardly share IR's optimism. See Amenta et al. (2010) and Giugni (1998).

[7] For example, in unpacking realist, rationalist, and revolutionist orientations Wight (1991) made reference to social movement leaders in addition to political philosophers arguing for these perspectives.

[8] We use the term realist here rather than conservative, since conservative movements are found across realist, rationalist, and revolutionist movements: for instance, revolutionist Islamist movements may promote conservative social values, but their position in relation to the state system is revolutionist rather than realist.

[9] Other nationalist movements – such as anti-colonial struggles – have sought goals such as independent statehood in a plural international society.

[10] This conception of rationalism is therefore highly distinctive from the notion of rationalism in the positivist sense.

[11] Zürn et al. (2013: 240) referred to this paradigm as 'world society 2', to distinguish it from the more conventional 'Polanyian/Habermasian' version.

[12] For primers on this debate, see Knodt (1994) and Rasch (1991).

[13] The thesis is that, over time, the 'integrative' function of the civil sphere fragmented across an array of functionally-differentiated sub-systems and organizations: from political parties and juridical systems of rights, to the media, religion, and specialized civil society organizations (Cohen and Arato, 1992). As these authors note, Luhmann's position holds similarities with Foucault's: though the former dissolves civil society according to system functionality, the latter does it through universal power relations taking the form of 'governmentality'.

[14] Hence, Luhmann's approach 'abandons the Marxist categories of alienation and emancipation; its shifts the analytical focus from questions of system transcendence to questions of system stabilization; and its emphasis on systemic imperatives and complexity echoes contemporary debates about the end of politics' (Blühdorn, 2007: 7). He also attacked Habermasian arguments as simplistic, considering that social communications have become too complex and fast for ideal speech situations to emerge (Rasch, 1991: 78).

[15] Because of their lower level of differentiation and organization, Luhmann viewed social movements to operate by 'flattening' complex issues and offering simplified rationalities of contestation about the functioning of society – what social movement literature refers as framing (Benford and Snow, 2000) –

while posing themselves as representatives of a 'good society', protesting 'from a sense of responsibility for society but against it' (Blühdorn, 2007: 8; Luhmann, 2013: 157–165).

[16] In this article, signaling is understood as an indirect form of communication, which may be unintentional and subject to interpretation by different audiences. This differs from the use of the term in Game Theory, which involves purposeful exchanges between actors holding asymmetric information.

[17] A similar idea was proposed by Lance Bennett and Sagerberg (2013), who saw social media as instrumental for the emergence of a new logic of 'connective action', enabling the transnational circulation of highly personalized mobilizing frames irrespective of the brokerage function of political institutions and traditional SM.

[18] These relational processes can take place simultaneously, or at different speeds, with world society-level transformations usually being associated with long-term trends in political culture, and state policy and institutional changes generally considered more responsive to near-term factors.

[19] Interestingly, Dieter Rucht (2018) claims that the German media, by granting disproportionate attention to right-populist activities, as well as clashes with left-wing counter-movements, contributed to augment the visibility and popularity of far-right groups.

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Figure 1. Social Movements in traditional IR approaches

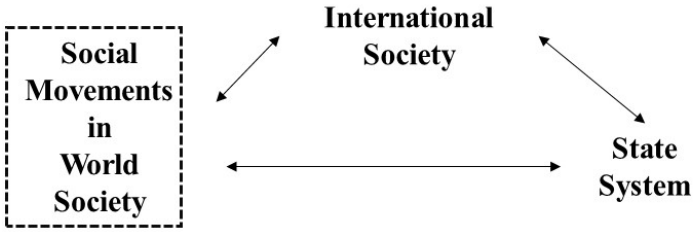

Figure 2. Social Movement Orientations to World Political Order

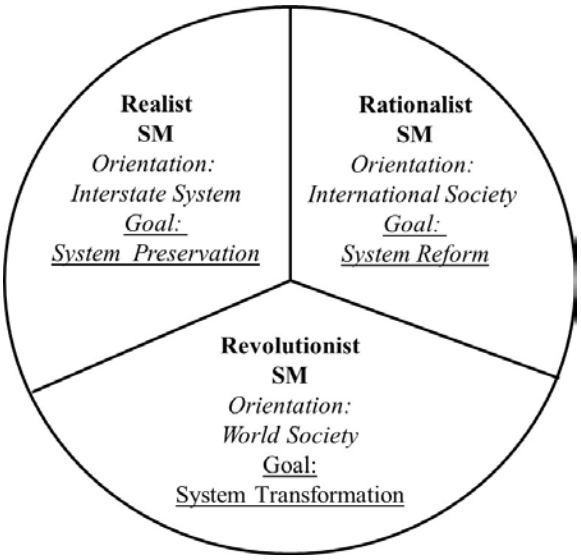

Figure 3. Typology of Social Movement – World Order Interactions

	Realist Movements	**Rationalist Movements**	**Revolutionist Movements**
State System	1. Collaboration (system preservation)	4. Negotiation (pluralist)	8. Antagonism (national-cosmopolitan struggles)
International Society	5. Negotiation (pluralist)	2. Collaboration (system reform)	6. Negotiation (solidarist)
World Society	9. Antagonism (national-cosmopolitan struggles)	7. Negotiation (solidarist)	3. Collaboration (system transformation)

Figure 4. Social Movements as Communications