

## ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT MOBILIZATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FOUR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS\*

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*When do nonactivist organizations become committed to social movement goals? Building on critiques of the "iron law of oligarchy," this article develops and tests the concept of organizational opportunity, analogous to political opportunity. It divides the concept along two dimensions, the attitudes and authority of organizational leaders. The article examines organizational opportunity in four religious organizations and the social movements that challenged their political quiescence: the civil rights movement in the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; Liberation Theology in the Latin American Roman Catholic Church; the Iranian revolutionary movement in the Shi'i Muslim ruhaniyat; and prodemocracy activism in the Burmese Buddhist sangha. Activist mobilization of these organizations since the 1950s and 1960s appears to be strongly related to variation in organizational opportunity.*

The importance of preexisting organizations for social movement mobilization has been one of the central premises of social movement theory for the past quarter century. Earlier, "breakdown" theories held that social organization was a conservative force, and that only individuals who have broken free or been cast loose from social bonds undertake protest activity. The newer, "solidarity" theories hold, by contrast, that social movement activism grows out of preexisting organization, which provides the setting, the solidarity, and the resources for sustained protest activity (Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975: 4-8).

I wish to examine how preexisting organizations become "cooptable" for social movement purposes (Freeman 1973: 794; McCarthy and Wolfson 1992). Social movement theory often explains the transformation of politically quiescent organizations into social movement resources by factors external to the organization, the most influential approach being the concept of "political opportunity" (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994). The concept of political opportunity focuses attention on the relationship between movement organizations and the state, and argues that changes in this relationship determine when organizations mobilize.

In this article, however, I attempt to "control" for external factors through case selection in order to focus on factors internal to the organization. I propose to treat formal organizations as analogous in meaningful ways to the polity at large. This is hardly a novel

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hardly a novel approach. Robert Michels's ([1915] 1962) famous study of the German Social Democratic Party began from the same premise and treated democracy within the organization and democracy within the polity as entirely comparable. Indeed, this is the basis for his ironic observation that political democracy may well depend upon organizational oligarchy. Political democracy in the modern age requires collective representation that is highly trained, functionally specialized, and stable over time; yet these characteristics create a leadership cadre that is oligarchic in its control of the organization. Furthermore, Michels argues, organizational leaders—even leaders of organizations seeking revolutionary change—develop styles of life and a taste for power that push the organization away from social movement goals.

If the "iron law of oligarchy" operates in a revolutionary organization, how much more conservative must be the leaders of non-social movement organizations? Although he does not discuss non-movement organizations at length, Michels's argument implies that they never turn from quiescence to activism. And yet they sometimes do. A generation of "solidarity" studies of social movements has raised two sets of objections to Michels's "iron law" (Jenkins 1977: 569-70).

First is an attitudinal objection: Does oligarchy mean conservatism? Students of social movements have noted various counter-examples in which non-social movement organizations were mobilized for social movement purposes *by organizational leaders*. Rather than the conservative force predicted by Michels, these leaders were more supportive of social change than their followers (Jenkins 1977; Rudwick and Meier 1972; Wood 1981). One movement theorist, building on his earlier work on "bloc recruitment" (Oberschall 1973), argues that this form of organizational mobilization is typical:

Movements for the most part do not start from scratch, but grow out of and federate an already existing set of groups and associations that have leaders, members. . . . If they do not already occupy prominent positions in some of these groups and associations, the originators of a new movement will reach out to those who do and try to win them over to their cause. These group and association leaders, if won over, will in turn bring in some of their rank and file members and allocate association resources to the goals and purposes which the social movement is pursuing. (Oberschall 1993: 24)

In more theoretical terms, one of the pioneering works in the solidarity perspective hypothesizes that collective action is a function of (a) the extent of a group's shared interests, (b) "the intensity of its organization (the extent of common identity and unifying structure among its members)," and (c) "the amount of resources under its collective control" (Tilly 1978: 84). Contrary to Michels's "iron law", collective control and unifying structure—elements of oligarchization—are deemed *favorable* for social movement activism.

Second is an authority objection: Is oligarchy ever-increasing? Again, there are counter-examples of organizations in which oligarchy was staved off (Gerlach and Hine 1970; Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1956; Rothschild-Whitt 1976), or even reversed (Ammerman 1990; Davis and Thompson 1994; Nyden 1985; Zald and Ash 1966). Two of the case studies below offer further instances. Hirschman's (1970) concept of "voice" and Zald and Berger's (1978) concept of "social movements in organizations" capture the notion that oligarchy may sometimes be successfully contested. Not only may leaders conflict with one another, but they are vulnerable to grass-roots movements among

members members who may mobilize resources within the organization just as the organization mobilizes its resources for action in external arenas (Chaves 1993b; Liebman, Sutton, and Wuthnow 1988).<sup>1</sup>

This objection to Michels is also at the core of "new social movement" theory. One of the features that allegedly characterizes contemporary movements is their self-conscious attempt to avoid or reduce oligarchization. Among left-libertarian political parties in Western Europe, according to one study, "a conspiratorial interpretation of Michels's theory of oligarchy is popular as the party's folk wisdom and colors the militants' zeal to prevent the emergence of bureaucratic organization and centralized authority" (Kitschelt 1990: 194). Similarly, numerous movements have emerged to "democratize" already oligarchic organizations: unions, voluntary associations, churches, even (as in parts of Eastern Europe after 1990) prodemocracy movements.<sup>2</sup>

These two objections to Michels's "iron law" run in somewhat contrary directions. The attitudinal objection suggests that organizations become committed to social movement goals through their leaders' activism; the authority objection attributes this shift to the activism of rank-and-file members. Since examples exist for both forms of organizational mobilization, we need an overarching explanatory framework that can account for both. The concept of organizational opportunity provides this framework.

### ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Doug McAdam (1996: 26-29) has recently attempted to improve the reliability of the concept of political opportunity by specifying four operationalizable dimensions of the concept: (1) relative openness of the institutionalized political system; (2) instability of elite alignments; (3) presence of elite allies; and (4) the state's reduced capacity or propensity for repression. The present definition of organizational opportunity rearranges these factors into two dimensions drawn from the critiques of the "iron law of oligarchy," an attitudinal dimension and an authority dimension. Organizational opportunity may be said to exist where: (1) the attitudes of the organizational leadership become less hostile or more favorable to social movement goals (as indicated by elite allies or reduced propensity for repression); or (2) the organizational leadership is less able to sanction members who pursue social movement goals (as indicated by institutional openness, instability of elite alignments, or reduced capacity for repression).

As the presence of these elements cannot be determined through quantitative measurement, they will be interpreted via focused historical narratives that, in keeping with recent work in social movement theory, take account of both post-hoc academic observation and the contemporary perceptions of social movement activists (Kurzman 1996). This study's hypothesis is that organizational opportunity is an important factor in understanding both the nature and extent of organizational mobilization.

The two dimensions of organizational opportunity are not related symmetrically. Leaders' declining power to expel activists (the authority dimension) may or may not cause the leaders to adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards them (the attitudinal dimension). There are instances when this is so, for example in the Iranian *ruhanyat* in

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<sup>1</sup> Zald and his collaborators use the term "mass movements" to describe these grass-roots challenges to organizational authority (Zald and Berger 1978; Zald and McCarthy 1987). The term is unfortunate because it connotes movements of isolated individuals (Kornhauser 1959), an image that does not match Zald's overarching argument that social movements grow out of solidary groups.

<sup>2</sup> The debate sparked by Piven and Cloward (1977) over the relative effectiveness of hierarchical and non-hierarchical protest movements is a separate issue. In this study, I am concerned only with organization-based movements, and do not enter the Piven-Cloward debate by comparing them with non-hierarchical movements.

the 1970s discussed later in this paper. But there are also cases when leaders have responded to declining power by digging in their heels; the Burmese *sangha*, analyzed below, may be an example of this. On the other hand, greater sympathy on the part of leaders (the attitudinal dimension) almost certainly makes it difficult for the organization to expel activists (the authority dimension). This appears to have been the case with Catholic liberation theologians in the 1960s and 1970s. The crux of organizational opportunity—as for political opportunity—is that favorable shifts in leaders' attitude and authority, singly or in combination, are perceived as consistent and reinforcing, thus creating opportunities for activists to mobilize the organization for social movement purposes. Both dimensions are potential sites of organizational conflict. Far from being an unexamined "black box," or a binary combination of leaders and followers, the organization is viewed as a complex arena of contested control. Sectors within the organization may challenge the very nature of the organization, its structure, and purposes. Either from positions of power, middle ranks, or the grass-roots, activists may seek to change the organization in basic ways.

However, the activists do not always succeed. One of the contributions of the political-opportunity model is its recognition that power is not evenly distributed within the polity. In periods of social quiescence, this uneven distribution is stable; only those seeking martyrdom (literal or figurative) consider challenging authority. But when potential activists perceive a favorable shift in the distribution of power, they may act to take advantage. The outcome then depends on the changing power relations among leaders, challengers, and third parties. Challengers succeed when they are able to mobilize more resources than their opponents. Reductions in the leaders' ability or willingness to counter the challenge lower the threshold of success.

These considerations lead the concept of organizational opportunity, and social movement theory, back into the sociology of organizations. For two decades, the study of social movements has drawn extensively on the sociology of organizations, but the influence has not been reciprocal, despite calls for attention to "social movements within organizations" (Zald and Berger 1978; Davis and Thompson 1994). The concept of organizational opportunity offers a social movement tool for organizational research, and permits social movement analysis to contribute to the study of power in organizations (Allen and Porter 1983; Fairholm 1993; Hardy 1995; Hardy and Clegg 1996; Hickson, Hinings, Schneck, and Pennings 1971; Hinings, Hickson, Pennings, and Schneck 1974; Mintzberg 1983; Pfeffer 1981; Zald 1970).

Like Michels's "iron law of oligarchy," the concept of organizational opportunity draws an explicit analogy between the nature of organizations and the nature of the polity (see also Long 1962; C. Smith 1991; Tushman [1977] 1983; Zald 1990; Zald and Berger 1978). Unlike Michels's work, however, the present approach views both organization and polity as potentially fluid and makes no unidirectional argument about the authority and attitudinal dimensions of oligarchy. In addition, I would like to offer several caveats to the analogy between organizational opportunity and political opportunities. Organizations are *unlike* polities in at least three ways: First, organizations are far more varied in organizational form than nation-states; second, organizations lack mutual exclusiveness in terms of membership; third, the coercive apparatus available to nation-states is far greater than that available to most organizations.

As a result of these differences, the organizational-opportunity model needs to recognize that (1) the model of parliamentary democracy, which has attracted most attention in the political-opportunity literature, may not be the most appropriate default model for organizational opportunity; (2) organizational authority is, at its strongest, somewhat weaker than the authority of most states; and (3) shifts in the distribution of

power within the organization are often linked to shifts outside of the organization. These caveats may help in the medium term to establish organizational opportunity as a concept in its own right, and not simply a derivative application of political opportunity.

### ORGANIZATIONAL MOBILIZATION

The explanandum for this study is organizational mobilization, defined here as the application of organizational resources—physical, financial, and human—to social movement activities. Mobilization may vary in at least three ways. The first variation is the raw percentage of organizational resources devoted to social movement purposes. In few cases, I imagine, will this proportion exceed one half. Even in a period of revolution, the routine functioning of the organization demands the lion's share of resources. The second variation is *which* resources become committed to social movement activities: the central office or branches, human resources or financial resources, and so on. The third variation involves the relationships among members, to what extent they tolerate differences of opinion as to social movement activism. It is possible, for instance, to have a middle-level mobilization in terms of the percent of resources being devoted to social movement purposes, but a low level of tolerance that leads the activists to be ejected from the organization.

However, the nature of the cases in this study precludes detailed measurement of these three axes. Instead, the study proceeds through a set of ideal types that lumps all three axes together: A fully mobilized organization applies a large portion of its resources to such activities, with either support or acquiescence throughout the organization. A partially mobilized organization applies some of its resources, with important sectors of the organization opposed to these activities. A non-mobilized organization applies few of its resources, with the sectors favoring mobilization forced to choose between activism or continued membership in the organization. Future research using more accessible cases may allow us to design more sophisticated measures of organizational mobilization.

### CASE SELECTION

This article examines four case studies of preexisting religious organizations that appear to be highly conducive to protest activity, according to leading criteria of social movement theory, but vary in the extent of organizational opportunity: African-American Baptist Christianity, Latin-American Catholic Christianity, Iranian Shi'i Islam, and Burmese Theravada Buddhism. Religious organizations are particularly good cases because they have been frequently identified in recent years as likely preexisting sources for social movements (Smith 1996; Yarnold 1991; Zald and McCarthy 1987). Contrary to Karl Marx's assessment of religion as "the opium of the people" (McClellan 1987: 13), religions are often "ambivalent [towards the status quo] and in fact have both encouraged as well as discouraged revolt" (Lewy 1974: 562; Billings 1990). Also, the structures of religious organizations have been extensively studied, especially regarding the issue of centralized authority—although much of the literature focuses on North American Protestantism (see Ammerman 1990; Chaves 1993a, 1993b; Liebman, Sutton, and Wuthnow 1988; Takayama 1974, 1975; and Zald and McCarthy 1987).

All of the cases involve religious organizations that meet four criteria establishing them as preexisting resources for social movement mobilization:

1. *National or International Hierarchies.* All four religions have highly evolved nationwide or international systems of training, evaluating, appointing, and promoting

members at all ranks (though the systems differ, as discussed below). All have interpersonal networks at the local and national (or international) levels. They offer frequent opportunities for members' social and professional contact, and a host of sites for gathering, such as schools and places of worship. Moreover, members of these organizations take their membership seriously and care about the fate of the institution. Even insurgents within the organization frame their challenge to the leadership in terms of revitalizing the organization.

2. *Ideological Resources for Social Movement Activism.* Although none of the four cases was actively involved in social movements at the beginning of the period of study, all have ideological elements conducive to protest and histories of activism that can be called upon as precedent. The African-American church could draw on biblical imagery, American constitutional ideals, and a long history of resistance to slavery and discrimination. Shi'i Islam could draw on activist themes from the early years of Islam, as well as precedents for confronting secular authorities. Burmese Buddhism drew on decades of anticolonial and postcolonial activism. Even the Roman Catholic Church, criticized by liberation theologians within its own ranks for its history of political apathy, has a simultaneous history of confronting political power (Mecham 1934). Liberation theologians self-consciously linked themselves with this alternative history: Gustavo Gutiérrez, for instance, named his research institute after Bartolomé de Las Casas, an activist sixteenth-century bishop.

3. *Autonomy from the State.* The state does not pay the religious officials' salaries, appoint religious officials, or dictate the content of religious doctrine. In the case of Islam, this characteristic distinguishes the Shi'i branch from the Sunni. Unlike many Sunni countries, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the Shi'i religious establishment in Iran traditionally has not depended primarily on the state for its budget.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Burmese Buddhism, the state has attempted since independence in 1948 to reestablish control over the religious hierarchy that was lost during the British conquest in the nineteenth century, but has only succeeded since the crackdown of 1990. The African-American church has never received considerable support from the state. The Latin American Catholic church, though it long enjoyed the status of official state religion in many countries, relies primarily on parishioners' contributions, land ownership, and international resources that make it financially independent of the state.

4. *Autonomy from Outside Groups.* Each of these religions raises funds from members rather than relying on outside "conscience constituents." In the African-American church, this characteristic historically distinguished clergymen from other African-American elites and allowed greater, though still limited, freedom of action.

The four cases also differ in terms three variables: political opportunity, organizational opportunity, and organizational mobilization. This allows us to test the correlation of organizational opportunity and mobilization while "controlling" for political opportunity (see summary in table 1). The variables are:

1. *Political Opportunity.* The political context ranges from the overt hostility of the Latin American military regimes towards the Catholic church in the 1960s and 1970s (Lernoux 1982: 463-70) to the national-level political opportunities that opened up for African-American activists in the 1950s (McAdam 1982). In Burma and prerevolutionary

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<sup>3</sup> These comments apply to the period prior to the revolution of 1979; since that time the Shi'i religious establishment has become far more integrated into the state and more hierarchical.

Table 1. Summar

Variables	African-American Baptist Church	Latin American Catholic Church	Iranian Shi'i Islamic Ruhaniyat	Burmese Buddhist Sangha
<i>Political Opportunities</i>				
Reduced hostility	Yes, 1950s-1965	Yes, democratization in 1980s	No until revolution of 1979	No after 1962
Weakened authority	Elite conflict 1950s	No	Yes, fall 1978	No after 1962
In sum	High 1950s-1965, low after 1965	Low 1950s-70s, increasing in 1980s	Low until fall 1978	High until 1962, nil after 1990
<i>Organizational Opportunities</i>				
Reduced hostility	Briefly in mid-1950s	Yes in 1960s-70s, but not since the late 1970s	No	Unclear
Weakened authority	Briefly in early 1960s	No	Yes after 1961	Yes after 1988
In sum	Low throughout	High — > low, 1980s	Low — > high, 1961	High throughout
<i>Organizational Mobilization</i>				
	Low throughout	Partial — > low, 1980s	Low — > high, mid-1978	High until 1990

Iran, the picture is murkier. In both cases, the state combined repression and attempts at cooptation. In Iran, this continued until the decisive shift of elite alliances in fall 1978; in Burma until the decisive turn to force in fall 1990. Changing political opportunity affected organizational mobilization in Burma, where the state crackdown forced organizational activists to retreat. In Iran, by contrast, organizational mobilization appears to have preceded, not followed, changes in political opportunity (Kurzman 1996).

If political opportunity were the only factor at work here, we would expect the greatest level of organizational mobilization from the African-American church and the least from Latin American Catholicism. Yet, as shown below, the African American church was the least mobilized organization in our matched set of cases, and organizational mobilization within Latin American Catholicism declined as political opportunity opened up with democratization in the 1980s. Indeed, Smith (1991) has argued with regard to Latin American liberation theology that state repression generated church sympathy for the activists—the lack of political opportunity may have contributed to the maintenance of organizational opportunity. I conclude from this that organizational opportunity may play an independent role in mediating political opportunity and organizational mobilization. The interaction among the various forms of opportunity structures is a fertile field for future research.

2. *Organizational Opportunity.* The four cases were selected expressly to vary in complementary fashion on this variable: two of the four organizations displayed significant organizational opportunity at the start of social movement mobilization in the 1950s-1960s, while two had lower levels. In each pair, one organization displayed significant organizational opportunity in the 1970s-1980s, while one had fewer opportunity (figure 1). Thus the cases vary in the level of opportunity for religious activists, both across cases and (for Catholicism and Shi'ism) over time. The details will be described in the narrative case studies below.

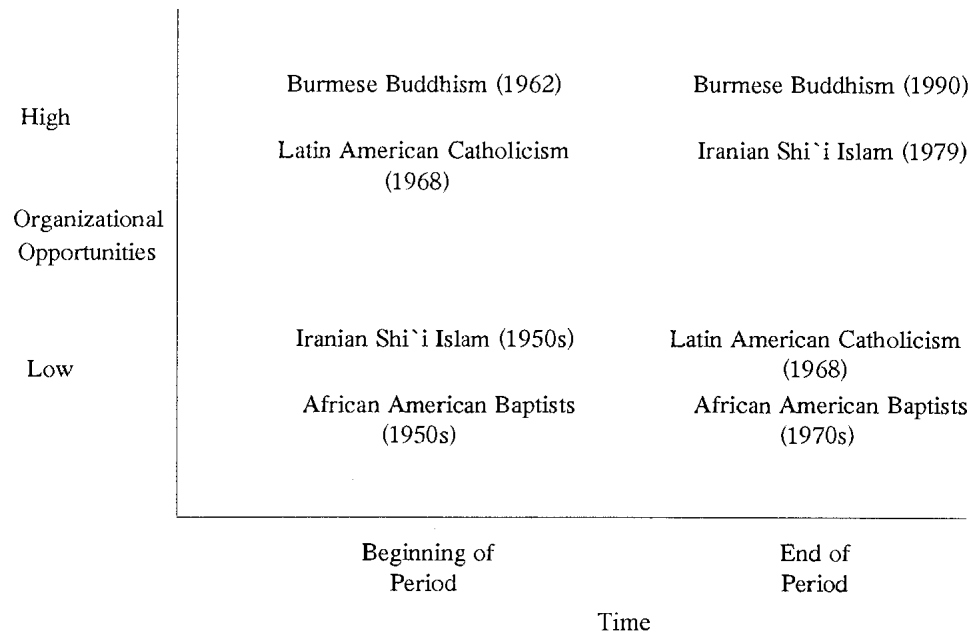
3. *Organizational Mobilization: the Dependent Variable.* The success of activists in coopting the religious organization also varies among the four cases. In the African-American church, mobilization was low: activists were unable to win over the church's largest organization to civil rights activism. In Iranian Shi'ism, mobilization grew to the point where activist clerics took over the "mosque network" during the course of the revolutionary mobilization of 1978. In Latin American Catholicism, mobilization was middle-range in the 1970s, when liberation theologians were able to devote substantial church resources to base-community activism, but lower in the 1980s, when liberation theologians and base communities were forced to restrain their activism or leave the church. Finally, Burmese Buddhism maintained a middle level of organizational mobilization since the late nineteenth century, despite the attempts of conservative leaders to rein in their activities, until the 1990 military crackdown, as described below.

## SOURCE MATERIAL

This qualitative comparative-historical study is based mainly on secondary sources, supplemented by three forms of primary material: the writings of the major players in each case in English and, for the case of Liberation Theology, Spanish; contemporaneous journalistic accounts, in English, of key episodes in each case; and a variety of Persian-language sources for the Iranian case (discussed in Kurzman 1995).

These sources were read with an eye towards organizational opportunity and internal conflict within the religious organization. Therefore, the case studies that follow do not present a full picture of the social movements involved; the grievances, political context, mobilization, ideology, and outcomes are largely ignored in favor of a focus on



**Figure 1.** Temporal Variations in Organizational Opportunities.

organizational infighting (keeping in mind that certain of these factors were taken into account during the process of case selection, as discussed above). This perspective may appear to place undue emphasis on dirty laundry; it certainly presents the religious organizations in a less than holy light. However, it is intended to balance the relative neglect of this arena in the literatures on three of the four cases (church conflict plays a fairly prominent role in discussions of Catholic liberation theology), and in social movement theory more generally.

Each case is narrated according to its own internal logic, but each includes the following elements: the initial organizational opportunity, the initial level of organizational activism, the interaction of challengers and leaders, the final organizational opportunity, and the final level of organizational activism.

#### **THE NATIONAL BAPTIST CONVENTION, U.S.A., INC.<sup>4</sup> AND THE U.S. CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1950s-1960s**

The Baptist church has long been one of the most influential organizations in the African-American community. However, it has not always been politically active, relying oftentimes on an all-powerful God who would right all wrongs without human assistance (Lincoln 1984: 55). During the first half of the twentieth century, Baptist and other African-American churches were largely otherworldly and politically accommodating (Frazier [1963] 1964: 86; Powdermaker 1943; Richardson 1947: 164). The church arguably went through a period of "deradicalization" (Wilmore 1983: 135-66) at this time, although some contemporary observers felt that the church was the center of "new

<sup>4</sup> The abbreviations appended to the Convention's name differentiate it from smaller splinter denominations. The present paper is concerned solely with the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.

racial aspirations and demands" (Allredge 1930: 319), "at last becoming alive to the needs of a people handicapped by social distinctions" (Woodson 1921: 304). Mays and Nicholson's classic study emphasizes the quietism of the African-American church, but also notes activist elements: "It is taken for granted that Negro ministers will courageously oppose lynching, Jim Crow law, and discrimination in the expenditure of tax money" (Mays and Nicholson [1933] 1969: 291). Since there was no widespread protest movement during this period, however, the church's activism was necessarily fragmented and sporadic.

As the civil rights movement accelerated in the 1950s and early 1960s, ministers were prominent among the leaders. McAdam (1982: 254-56) lists 66 ministers among 183 "indigenous protest leaders" from the first phase of the civil rights movement. Aldon Morris's influential book, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* (1984), notes:

The black church functioned as the institutional center of the modern civil rights movement. Churches provided the movement with an organized mass base; a leadership of clergymen largely economically independent of the larger white society and skilled in the art of managing people and resources; an institutionalized financial base through which protest was financed; and meeting places where the masses planned tactics and strategies and collectively committed themselves to the struggle (Morris 1984: 4).

Alliances of African-American ministers existed, Morris continues, at the local, regional, and national levels.

If these ministers, through their informal and formal bodies, could be persuaded to support protest activity, each could then mobilize his own slice of the community. The National Baptist Convention, one such body, operates on the national level with a membership of more than 5 million (Morris 1984: 12).

However, we should be careful not to exaggerate the church's commitment to the civil rights movement (Reed 1986: 51). Although individual ministers were clearly active, the African-American ministry as a whole was never mobilized for the civil rights movement. In particular, the group mentioned specifically by Morris, the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.—the nation's largest African-American religious organization representing more than 18,000 ministers and almost half of all African-American Christians (*Yearbook of American Churches* 1954)—became increasingly hostile as the civil rights movement progressed.

The president of the Convention since 1953, Reverend Joseph Harrison Jackson, was no opponent of civil rights per se, as he often pointed out (Jackson 1980: 462-63). Initially, he even supported outspoken activism (Hamilton 1972: 119-21). At the 1956 Convention, Jackson praised Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the young leader of an Alabama desegregation boycott that Jackson had helped to raise money to support (Fitts 1985: 100; King 1967: 10; Paris 1991: 39-40). Jackson spoke at a celebratory church service when the boycott succeeded several months later.

He [Jackson] never had openly endorsed the boycott, and he said almost nothing of it that day. Nevertheless, his presence as the titular head of the largest and most powerful organization controlled by















Khomeini's policies. In the most famous case, Shari'at-Madari charted a somewhat independent course and allowed a political party to be organized with his blessing (Akhavi 1980: 172-80). As Khomeini's clerical followers assumed state power through mid-1979, however, they were able to shut down organizational opportunity within the *ruhdnayat*. In 1982, Shari'at-Madiiri, who had become the leading symbol of clerical opposition to Khomeini, was publicly denounced as a monarchist collaborator, placed under house arrest, and stripped of his religious authority (Bakhash 1984: 223).

In sum, Khomeini and other activists within the Shi'i religious establishment were able to mobilize the "mosque network" for revolutionary purposes only after the death of *Ayatullah* Burujirdi, when no comparably powerful successor emerged to maintain centralized control over the *ruhaniyat*. Taking advantage of the opening of organizational opportunity along the authority dimension, the activists built new, parallel networks in order to prepare their forces for organizational mobilization, and overpowered reluctant religious leaders during the revolutionary period of 1978-1979. The activists consolidated their control over the *rihaniyat* after mid-1979, using the power of the state.

#### **BURMESE BUDDHISM AND OPPOSITION TO MILITARY RULE, 1962-1990**

The Burmese *sangha*, or monkhood, has been a source of political activism since the late nineteenth century, when the British conquered the region. Part of this activism has been the result of changes in the organization of the *sangha*. Prior to colonization, the king of Burma was "remarkably successful" in controlling the *sangha* through the appointment of the *thathanabaing*, the chief monk (Bechert 1970: 769). The British, fearing the potential for organized resistance to their rule, limited the powers of this office, and discontinued it entirely in the early 20th century, opening organizational opportunity along the authority dimension by reducing the *sangha* leaders' ability to control the activities of the monks (Mendelson 1975: 179ff; Sarkisyanz 1965: 11 Off; D. Smith 1965: 45ff; Woodward 1988). A small but visible minority of the *sangha* became prominent among the movements against British rule (Spiro 1982: 378). The *sangha* elders, who remained "very conservative," decried such activism as "highly undesirable," but no longer had the power to restrain activist monks (D. Smith 1965: 55). By contrast, the Shwegyin order of monks, which maintained sturdier organizational discipline during the colonial period than the main Thudhamma order, remained noticeably more apolitical (Ferguson 1978). But the Shwegyin constituted less than fifteen percent of the *sangha* (Spiro 1982: 316; Than Tun 1988: 166).

During the first years after independence in 1948, monks continued to play an active role in Burmese politics, culminating in their conflicts with Prime Minister U Nu in 1960-1962. U Nu ran for reelection in 1960 on a Buddhist revivalist platform, promising among other things to make Buddhism the state religion. Non-Buddhist religious minorities sought protections for their communities; when U Nu began to offer some measures in this direction, significant segments of the *sangha* mobilized in opposition (Mendelson 1975: 352-5; D. Smith 1965: 272-74). Again, prominent *sangha* leaders appealed to monks to cease their activism, to no avail (D. Smith 1965: 275).

Therefore, organizational opportunity had long existed on the authority dimension, and activist members of the *sangha* had a long tradition of political mobilization behind them when General Ne Win carried out a coup d'etat in March 1962. The period of military rule since 1962 has witnessed a continuation of this tradition with periodic mobilizations by monks against military rule. In 1962 and again in 1965, large

portions of the *sangha* resisted government attempts to register monks. U Nu's efforts to accomplish this in the 1950s had foundered on *sangha* opposition, and Ne Win's did as well (Silverstein 1977: 97-98; M. Smith 1991: 205-06; Tin Maung Maung Than 1988: 52). In 1963, monks protested the repeal of pro-Buddhist laws passed in the U Nu era (Bechert 1984: 151), such as official observance of Buddhist holidays (D. Smith 1965: 283). In 1970 through 1972, the army clamped down on militant monks in northern Burma who constituted the regime's sole remaining opposition force (Lintner 1990: 88). In 1974, monks demonstrated against the state's disrespectful burial of U Thant, the former head of the United Nations (Lintner 1990: 52).

Not all monks, however, opposed the military regime. Some had welcomed the coup d'etat of 1962: "They liked the idea of a strong ruler who promised change and who could solve all their problems," said one monk. "It was rather like Hitler in Germany" (M. Smith 1991: 204). In 1980, more than 1,000 senior monks cooperated with the military regime in order to reestablish the sort of discipline within the *sangha* that broke down at the time of the British conquest. Meeting in a general conference, they created a national governing body for the *sangha*, the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* (Great Monkhood Council) (Bechert 1984: 154; Matthews 1993: 415; Taylor 1987: 358; Tin Maung Maung Than 1988: 36-40). This new organization specified a clerical hierarchy, required monks to carry identification papers, and created a disciplinary system for punishing or defrocking disobedient monks (Tin Maung Maung Than 1988: 40-45). However, this attempt to bolster authority structures and reduce organizational opportunity failed to achieve widespread compliance (Tin Maung Maung Than 1993: 33).

After a half-decade of relative calm, thousands of monks joined the prodemocracy movement of 1988. On August 2, monks participated with students and others at a large demonstration at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, calling on the military government to step aside. On August 8, a general strike featured "a disciplined column of hundreds of Buddhist monks carrying their alms bowls upside down to indicate that the entire nation was on strike" (Lintner 1990: 92-94). In Mandalay, senior monks such as U Kahwiya, U Kawainda, and later U Yaiwata and U Laba allowed their monasteries to be used as bases for the protest movement, and set up organizations such as the *Sangha Samaggi* (Monks' Committee) in competition with the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* (Maung 1992: 175-76, 184-86). Also, younger monks organized the All-Burma Young Monks Union, a national group that aspired to mobilize the *sangha* politically outside of traditional seniority hierarchies (Clements 1992: 49; Matthews 1993: 421).

An estimated 80 percent (Matthews 1993: 419) of Burma's 120,000 monks (Steinberg 1990: 51) favored the prodemocracy movement. Large portions of the organizational resources of the *sangha* were being used for social movement purposes, in particular the monasteries of Rangoon and Mandalay that became focal points for the national movement. However, the senior monks of the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* consistently disapproved of social movement activism. On August 10, 1988, two days after the general strike and massive, illegal pro-democracy demonstrations, the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* issued this ambivalent statement:

The people of the country, both *sangha* and laity, should live peacefully within the framework of the law and should submit to the government their just aspirations by peaceful means ... a special request has been made to the Government to fulfil as far as possible the people's lawful aspirations (Aung San Suu Kyi 1991: 192).

This statement-similar to ones made by Reverend Joseph H. Jackson in the early 1960s and by moderate Iranian *ayatullahs* in January 1978-sounds sympathetic to the activists but condemns the civil disobedience at the heart of their activism. It was recognized as problematic by Burmese activists (Abbott 1990: 160). One official of the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* accused activist monks of anti-Buddhist behavior: acts that may "taint their moral and spiritual virtue," as well as "words and deeds that may break the unity of the Sangha Committees at different levels ... the worst kind of sin under Buddhism-causing schism among the Sangha" (FBIS-EAS, Oct. 3, 1988: 34).

When the military reasserted control in September 1988, some monks continued to protest. Troops were brought to Rangoon in November and "surrounded all major monasteries" with orders "that if they saw any men in yellow clothes, these were only 'robed persons' and not monks," and therefore not immune to repression (Lintner 1990: 164). In 1989 and early 1990, when the military regime allowed elections, "the *sangha* was at the forefront of agitation" (Matthews 1993: 420). This agitation was aimed not just at the military regime, but also at the conservative monks of the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* who supported the regime (Maung 1992: 177).

When the military annulled the elections-the results had gone against them-monks took the initiative. According to Lintner 1994: 310-311), "On 8 August 1990, the second anniversary of the 1988 uprising, thousands of Buddhist monks marched through the streets of Mandalay. . . . Some soldiers apparently over-reacted. " Several monks were shot, others beaten and arrested. In response, many monks refused to perform religious services for soldiers and their families, "in effect excommunicating anyone associated with the military. " The *Sangha Maha Nayaka* issued statements opposed to the boycott, and again called for *sangha* unity (FBIS-EAS, Oct. 19, 1990: 50-51; Oct. 22, 1990: 38). At one meeting between *Sangha Maha Nayaka* officials and government military leaders, a general asked "how much power the senior monks present at the meeting had to resolve the problem and whether they have influence over other monks" (FBIS-EAS, Oct. 19, 1990: 51). This was precisely the issue: organizational opportunity had existed since the late nineteenth century because the senior monks' authority over the *sangha* was limited. As it turned out, the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* proved unable to end the 1990 boycott; "hardline" monks rejected its instructions and promised to continue (FBIS-EAS, Oct. 22, 1990: 37). As a result, the military stepped in and crushed the monks' opposition, attacking all 133 monasteries in Mandalay, the center of *sangha* activism, and arresting scores of monks (Clements 1992: 51; Lintner 1994: 312; Maung 1992: 185-86).

Burmese *sangha* activism virtually ceased with the crackdown of fall 1990. Yet the end of Buddhist activism in Burma did not come about as a result of the victory of the non-activists within the *sangha*. It came about as an indirect result of their failure. Because they proved unable to control the activists within the *sangha* and close organizational opportunity, the military took it upon itself to step in and shut down political opportunity. Thus the wave of activism ended with relatively high levels of organizational opportunity and organizational mobilization.

## CONCLUSION

The four cases in this study display a strong correlation between organizational opportunity and organizational mobilization for social movement purposes. In the case of the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., civil rights activists perceived a limited opportunity for church reform and attempted to take over the organization. Despite the national-level political opportunity that McAdam (1982) and others have identified, these

activists were unable to unseat the leadership of the Convention, the largest institution in the African-American church. The Convention subsequently hardened its antimovement stance. While organizational opportunity did not favor national mobilization, it allowed local mobilization, since the Convention had no authority to remove ministers from their congregations. Activist ministers pursued social movement goals on an alternative basis, mobilizing at the local level, forging coalitions, and creating a new splinter denomination.

In the case of the Catholic Church, the organizational opportunity consisted of liberalization of church attitudes at Vatican II, which allowed liberation theologians to mobilize throughout Latin America. Beginning in the early 1970s, and especially when a new pope began to express opposition to social movement activism in the late 1970s, the liberation theologians found their opportunity for action restricted. Some were punished, while others cut back their social movement activities, and many curbed their challenges to church authority. As a result, the base communities they had organized lessened their activism or left the church.

In the case of Iranian Shi'ism, activists within the *ruhan yat* stepped up their mobilization after the death of Ayatullah Burujirdi in 1961, when organizational opportunity arose from the lack of a powerful successor. Activists created alternative national networks that bore fruit during the revolutionary events of 1978 and early 1979, when activists challenged senior leaders to reject political quiescence. The conservative leaders did not have the organizational power to withstand this pressure, and allowed the activists full use of the *ruhan vat's* resources, such as mosques and religious ceremonies.

In the case of Burmese Buddhism, organizational opportunity dated back to the British conquest of the late nineteenth century, when the leader of the *sangha*, the *thathanabaing*, was stripped of his power. Periodically since then, leading conservative monks have attempted to rebuild the authority of the *sangha* organization, most recently with the creation of the *Sangha Maha Nayaka* in 1980, but they proved unable to control activist monks. Finally, in 1990, the state stepped in to control the activists, closing political opportunity decisively because the *sangha* leaders were unable to shut down organizational opportunity.

In sum, religious institutions with greater organizational opportunity (Burma, Iran after 1961, Catholicism before the 1980s) were partially or fully mobilized for social movement activism. Institutions with less organizational opportunity (the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., Iran before 1961, and Catholicism in the 1980s) were less mobilized for social movement activism (see table 1).

In addition, the form of activism appears to be related to the form of the organization opportunity. In the African-American Baptist church, activism proceeded from the local level, reflecting the power of congregations to select ministers. In the Catholic Church, semiautonomous orders such as the Jesuits and the Maryknolls supported liberation theologians when the Vatican's attitude towards activism cooled. In Burma and Iran, the religious organization was susceptible to large-scale mobilization because of the removal of the strong organizational leader, by colonizers in one case and by a failure of succession in the other.

These findings suggest that the concept of organizational opportunity is useful for the study of social movements. In theoretical terms, discussed at the beginning of the paper, the concept incorporates the two primary criticisms of Robert Michels's "iron law of oligarchy": that oligarchies are not uniformly conservative; and that oligarchization is not inevitable and permanent. Empirically, the concept helps explain when and in what ways preexisting organizations are mobilized for social movement purposes.

If the concept of organizational opportunity proves applicable to organizations more generally-and not simply for religious organizations historically conducive to social

movement activism, as in the present cases-it appears to suggest three areas for further research on social movements.

First, the concept of organizational opportunity underlines the importance of "social movements within organizations" (Zald and Berger 1978). Over the past generation, social movement theory has frequently borrowed from the sociology of organizations, but there has been relatively less influence in the other direction. The concept of organizational opportunity offers a conceptual framework for studying organizations as a locus of collective contestation over authority and resources, suggesting that the field of power in organizations may be fruitfully studied through the lens of social movement theory.

Second, the concept of organizational opportunity draws attention to organizations within organizations. While subunits have long been studied in the sociology of organizations, social movement theory has tended to treat organizations as single units. The cases in this study suggest that organizational activists routinely develop overlapping or substitute organizations-the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Bartolome de Las Casas Center, the *Shi'i Teaching* journal, and the Mandalay Monks' Committee, for example. Each of these organizations challenged the parent organization's control by developing alternative lines of authority and alternative accumulations of resources. These examples blur the distinction between the mobilization of preexisting organizations and the creation of new organizations, and raise intriguing questions about the relationship of the organization and its parts.

Third, the concept of organizational opportunity calls into question the effects of resources on social movement activism. Since the 1970s, the resource mobilization approach has viewed resources as positively and linearly related to the emergence and success of social movements. Tilly's (1978) classic hypotheses were quoted above: collective action is in part a function of the intensity of organization and "the amount of resources under its collective control." In this view, the more authority that organizational leaders have over members, the more resources they are able to extract from members, the greater the likelihood of collective action.

The concept of organizational opportunity suggests that this correlation only holds for cases where the organizational leadership becomes devoted to social movement goals (in other words, for the attitudinal dimension of organizational opportunity, as defined above). In cases where the push for activism comes from the middle or lower ranks of the organization, we may have a different sort of correlation. In these cases, the leaders' high level of authority and control over resources may serve to *reduce* organizational mobilization, as activists are unable or unwilling to challenge the organizational leadership.

We may speculate that for the authority dimension of organization opportunity, the correlation between resources and collective action takes the form of an inverted-U, as several recent studies have suggested for the broader polity: extremely repressive states are able to cow the opposition into quiescence, and non-repressive states face little unrest because their political systems offer channels for the institutionalized expression of grievances (Boswell and Dixon 1993; Gupta, Singh, and Sprague 1993; Muller 1985; Muller and Weede 1990). The middle-range of repression is most associated with social movement opposition. By analogy, low levels of collective control over resources make the organization a prize not worth winning; high levels of collective control over resources make the prize unwinnable; middle levels make it both potentially winnable and worth winning, and would be associated with a greater likelihood of organizational mobilization. The cases in this study are not well-suited to test this inverted-U hypothesis because they were selected to represent both forms of organizational opportunity, and not

solely the authority dimension; this work will have to be left to the proverbial future research.

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