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SOCIAL MOVEMENT NAMING PRACTICES
AND THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

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The concept of political opportunity structure is central to studies of social movements, and contentious politics more generally. Despite being frequently employed to account for movement mobilisation, development and success, the concept is sometimes confusing. Several definitions are in circulation. The distinction between the political opportunity structure as a structure and "opportunities" more generally is not clear. Finally, "movement scholars have spent comparatively little time and energy systematically studying the role that movements may play in reshaping the institutional structure and political alignments of a given polity" (McAdam 1996: 36). This article addresses this last point by highlighting a particular - but necessary - action of social movements, that of "naming". This perspective then leads to a focus on process and social construction, which directly addresses the confusion between opportunities as a structure external to a social movement and the consequences of movement actions for opportunities.

By "naming" I mean the designation, via a collective identity, of the community for whom the social movement speaks. It is the identification of the "we". Choice of a name is an action; names are never essences. Analysing this particular action provides a fair test of the proposition that social movements may, under some circumstances, significantly reconfigure the political opportunity structure, albeit without necessarily achieving their goals. The article tests this proposition by comparing the naming practices of two social movements, neither of which has achieved its major goals for its own constituency. These movements are Aboriginal peoples living in Canada and the French women's movement.

Political opportunity structure: Caught between clarity and utility

The concept was first developed in order to account for the "when" of social movement mobilisation, identifying the conditions which facilitate or account for mobilisation.[1] It also

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[1] This article has the luxury of only briefly presenting the concept, because recent publication provides two excellent overviews (see McAdam *et al*. 1996a and especially McAdam 1996).

served as a conceptual escape hatch from the ongoing controversy between students of the "how" of social movement action - the resource mobilisation school - and the "why" - new social movement approaches (Tarrow 1994: 83). As a solution to this initial dispute the concept of political opportunity structure has served its makers well. It is now a core concept, enabling studies of emerging movements to take the environment of social movements into account.[2] The popularity of the concept of political opportunity structure is now also its bane, however. It has, in usage, become a slippery notion.[3]

Originally the definition was quite limited. The political environment was a conditioning factor - or intervening variable - for movement mobilisation, located between the social, economic and political conditions of disadvantage and the results of claims-making of movements. This structure was something into which the movement entered. "Theorists of the political opportunity structure emphasize the mobilization of resources *external* to the group" (Tarrow 1994: 85, emphasis in the original; see also 1983: 28). McAdam's recent review of the literature identifies four dimensions of political opportunity: the relative openness or closure of the institutionalised political system; the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; the presence or absence of elite allies; the state's capacity and propensity for repression (1996: 27). All are external to the movement.

Movements make headway as the structure opens. The metaphor of gates, doors and entry points dominates. Of course, success is not automatic. In the classic formulation, the advantage goes to the movement sensitive to its environment, capable of exploiting its opportunities. These "early risers" then teach other movements as well as generate opportunities for further and wider mobilisation. Thus, social movements not only seize opportunities; they also make them (Tarrow 1994: 96; 1996: 58ff).

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[2] McAdam (1995) identifies emergence as the primary focus of social movement studies thus far.

[3] While Gamson and Meyer (1996: 275) fear that "used to explain so much, it [the political opportunity structure] may ultimately explain nothing at all", McAdam (1996: 24-31) acknowledges the slipperiness of the definition but tries to put some order in it.

The theoretical difference or connections between these opportunities created in action and the political opportunity structure is not clear.[4] A first confusion is that "opportunities" appear in two places in the causal argument. They are both variables which account for mobilisation and the product of mobilisation itself. A second confusion is that the political opportunity structure is treated as a factor external to the world of movements, while opportunities created through action are found primarily inside the world of movements.

Structures and actions

Students of social movements have always taken care to stay close to their data; this is one of the real strengths of the field. In examining "their" movements, they observed clear examples of opportunities being created. Therefore they incorporated this aspect of social movement practice into the argument. The incorporation, which was necessitated by the "facts on the ground", has created problems, however. Coming out of the mainstream traditions of American sociology and political science, much of the literature that utilises the concept of political opportunity structure uses an essentially linear causal reasoning.

In the beginning, opportunities appeared between - intervening between - the root conditions of disadvantage and discontent and the outcomes of collective action.[5] Thus the environment had an influence on mobilisation success while at any single point in time the

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[4] McAdam addresses this difficulty by distinguishing between emergence and development, so that the life-cycle of the movement becomes the factor determining whether the movement is constrained by the structure of opportunities or whether the movement might generate its own opportunities (1996: 13). Suzanne Staggenborg, using the concept of protest cycles, makes a somewhat similar distinction about time. The idea is that there are "rounds" of struggle. Success or defeat in round 1 may produce changes in round 2 (1991: 8).

[5] It is interesting that the structural conditions of disadvantage and inequality, which theorists of the "first wave" used to account for social movement emergence, have fallen almost completely out of the conceptual basket. Thus, Gamson and Meyer describe the political opportunity structure as an independent variable (1996: 275).

political opportunity structure was fixed.[6] For a social movement, then, the characteristics of the political opportunity structure at any time was a given. Later, as we have seen, opportunities appeared as the product or consequence of action. That is, *in a single analysis* opportunities might be located at two places in the causal chain, making their status in a linear argument quite ambiguous.[7]

This ambiguity is not without its benefits. It encourages one to pose new questions and to rethink the logic of the argument. The notion - generated by the real life of movements - of "making opportunities" hints that a less linear and more dynamic form of reasoning may be useful. Such an alternative logic is available in work which stresses processes of structuration, of the constitution of structures by agents whose actions may result either in reinforcement or change. The outcomes may be unintended as well as intentional. The actions are always strategic, in the sense that actors behave purposively, but the practices can vary widely.

One expression, among the many available, of the social constructivism underpinning structuration appears in this quote:

> In the view I am proposing here collective action is considered as the result of purposes, resources, and limits, as a purposive orientation constructed by means of social relationships within a system of opportunities and constraints. (Melucci 1988: 332)[8]

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[6] Obviously, theorists always allowed for the possibility that the political opportunity structure might change over time, either in response to the actions of social movements or as a result of unrelated factors. Indeed, the notion of change is at the heart of the concept, when authors focus on new access, alignments, and allies which become available and entice mobilization. Nonetheless, as a structure, it is fixed for any single moment in time.

[7] The operative idea here is *in a single analysis*. As a number of literature reviews suggest, the political opportunity structure may be an independent or a dependent variable. Its status depends on the question asked by each author. I am not making any assessment of the decision of particular authors to treat the structure as a dependent or an independent variable. This comment relates only to treatment within one analysis.

[8] Another way of expressing this is to say that collective actors are simultaneously subjects of ongoing social structures and acting subjects, carrying in their practices and meaning systems possibilities for system reproduction or social change and transformation (Jenson 1989: 236-237; 1995: 115).

Or to cite another who theorised social movements, "men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please..." (Marx 1962: 247).

Such a form of reasoning familiar to some historical sociologists might profitably be given more attention by social movement scholars. The ultimate goal of both structurationists and those using linear causal reasoning is to gain explanatory purchase, but the route to that power is different.

Structurationists focus less on comparing statics and more on the processes by which actors make or do not make change, within the constraints of their structural location. The central notion is that the social world, including its constraining structures, are made in action. Through practical activity, involving the deployment of cultural resources, including language, actors engage in reflexive monitoring of their own conduct and that of those around them (Smith 1991: 140). Unequal power relations are reproduced - or changed - by action. Process rises to the top of the analytic agenda.

If one sees actors as embodying cultural knowledges and practices and deploying them in their engagement with structures, which their very action is making, it becomes difficult to maintain hard and fast distinctions between culture and structure. The boundary between external and internal blurs, as does that between objective and subjective. In a provocative formulation we might say that opportunities do not exist until perceived, interests do not exist until defined, and constituencies do not exist until named.

What's in a name?

Recent studies of social movements have begun to stress the need to pay more attention to culture, ideas and especially framing in order to gain explanatory leverage on collective

action. For example, Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans write that their collection "places culture at the center" of its concerns (1995: 3), while McAdam *et al*. devote one third of their analytical framework and their book to the "collective processes of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action" (1996: 2). This shift in perspective is laudable. Nonetheless, simply invoking culture or framing work does not necessarily mean that the analyst has become a structurationist. Cultural theorists can obviously be structuralists. Moreover, much of the literature which uses framing as a core concept never raises the longstanding and fundamentally thorny problem dear to so many structurationists, of when an objective interest, read off a social structural location, becomes an interest recognised by a collective actor.[9]

The problem of identity formation has lost none of its political relevance.[10] Rather than addressing this issue, however, most of the framing literature takes the existence of the interest - and often the movement - for granted, and then proceeds to ask questions about the conditions under which recognition by others will occur. In the classic presentation of frame analysis to the social movement field, Snow and Benford wrote:

> ... we suggest that there are three core framing tasks: (1) a diagnosis of some event or
> aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration; (2) a proposed solution to the
> diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done; and (3) a call to arms or rationale

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[9] It is interesting to note that the problem can be defined with reference to Marx's reflections on class formation. See, for example, Giddens (1981), Abrams (1982) or the classic Thompson (1968 [1963]), all of whom engaged with Marx. Writing of gaps in existing approaches to social movement analysis in the 1980s, Melucci said: "Marx's old problem (how to pass from class in itself, from class conditions to class action) remains, unsolved, in the background" (1988: 329-30).

[10] That is why it is sad that if anything, as we have seen rising interest in culture and values (for example, the authors in Klandermans and Johnston 1995; Banaszak 1996) there has been a decline in attention to collective identity. Alberto Melucci obviously provides a well-known example of a focus on collective identity, but he prefers to move deeply into cognitive processes and leave aside the political process (see for example, 1995). William Gamson's work recognises the social construction of the "we" in his concept of collective action frames (see, for example, 1995), but he is most interested in the impact of media recognition. In their overview of the field, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly do say, "participants in national movements make claims on authorities, but they also assert their own identities - or those of the populations for which they claim to speak - as worthy, weighty, and solidary actors" (McAdam *et al*. 1996b: 22), but it is evident that the real interest is elsewhere.

> for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action. ...It is our thesis that variation in the success of participant mobilization, both within and across movements, depends upon the degree to which these three tasks are attended to. (1988: 199)[11]

In this conceptualisation, the presence of the movement and even the interests it is mobilizing are treated as givens rather than problematised. Because of this lack of attention to identity formation within frame analysis, I prefer to work with the concept of *representation*. Too much is swept under the rug when we neglect the identity work of social movements, and do not pay attention to basic representational activity, including that of naming.

The choice of a name is a crucial component of social movement action. For example, one of the first actions of many movements of women of the 1960s was to insist on being called "women", rejecting other possible names and even the singular form. They spoke of "we the women", thereby refusing the notion of the eternal feminine implied by "woman", although that was the name most often used in the first wave (see, for example, Banaszak, 1996). They also refused to carry the name of the men to whom they were related. They did this not simply by inventing new forms of address, such as Ms, but also by downplaying names which made distinctions among women by isolating family relations, such as wife or daughter, or class relations, such as lady or working woman.

Another way of stating the centrality of naming to social movement politics is to note that representation of an identity is a prior condition to the representation of an interest to the state or other actors. Movements exist only to the extent that they can contest *in the name* of someone. Therefore, in a strictly semantical sense (which also has an ontological character) a social movement, in order to be a social movement, must have a name.

Much social movement mobilisation involves the struggle to be self-naming (Chartrand 1991). The reproduction of oppression includes the imposition of a name, or outside-naming.

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[11] A similar lack of attention to the formation of the constituency, rather than the emergence of the movement, is present in Klandermans' discussion of consensus formation (1988).

Representations of the social relations of colonialism were reproduced daily with the use of names such as "boy" and those of racism by the use of "nigger". One of the first acts of social movement organisations was to insist on names of respect. We might indeed describe the transition from being outside-named to having sufficient power to be self-naming as the sign that a new form of contentious politics has emerged.[12] As homosexuals initially worked to push "queer", "pansy" and other negative names out of the vocabulary of outsiders, we recognised the presence of a new social movement.[13]

Names are never essences; they are the result of action choices. Again, by way of example, for the movements of women in the 1960s differences in naming abounded within and across movements. Some wings of the movement chose to name themselves in the singular, speaking of the "female condition" or the "woman question" and uncovering victimisation by social structural forces. Others chose a more active, pluralistic sort of name.[14] Some chose to call their movement feminist, limiting it to those who shared an ideology, while others named it the women's movement, thereby broadening the reach. Similar differences among choices can be observed in what we now call the gay rights movement, which has changed its name - for important strategic reasons - from homosexual to gay and lesbian and now even for some back to queer.

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[12] It is not only social movements which seek the power to be self-naming, of course. Individuals, corporate entities, states and so on often place a high value on not being outside-named. Think, for example, of the name changes which states made to mark the end of colonialism or other significant transitions.

[13] This example shows the importance of making a distinction between names used on the inside of the movement and those accepted when they come from outsiders. Some movements reappropriate the names of dismissal and use them among themselves. In addition, as we have seen in recent years, deploying the old names ("queer", for example) can have value in staking out radical space. This strategy works precisely because earlier waves of the movement had so successfully banished the name from accepted usage among outsiders.

[14] In France, for example, well into the 1970s the Communists, including feminists within the party, spoke of the *condition féminine*, thereby representing women as victims of capitalism. Other branches of the movement identified themselves as *femmes en mouvement*, with all that the nomenclature implied for action, creativity, and so on.

The choice of a name has four consequences for the positioning and capacities of any movement. First, a name generates strategic resources. Drawing boundaries around a community makes the resources of that community available to the movement as well as generating the solidarity necessary for successful action. Secondly, selecting one name over another sets discursive boundaries, such that some claims become meaningful and others less relevant. Thirdly, any definition of one's own community locates it in relationship to others. Therefore, it presents possibilities for alliances as well as for identifying opponents. Likely conflicts and patterns of co-operation follow the borders delimiting the community. Fourthly, a name has consequences for the routing of claims through state institutions. Routes to representation become available in accordance with the name selected.[15]

Examination of this fourth consequence of naming redirects our attention from the social movement itself towards the principal query of this article: to wit, might an action of a social movement, in this case its choice of a name, reconfigure the political opportunity structure? Might a movement do so, even if it is not "making opportunities" in the usual way that is understood, as the mark of successful collective action?[16]

One of the case studies of this article is of a movement, Aboriginal peoples in Canada, that did not achieve its major goals. Despite its relative lack of success in constitutional politics (up until the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord in 1992, which is the period of time considered here) its actions and claims in the name of Aboriginal nationalism had important and enduring consequences for the structures of political decision-making in federal politics. This is the reason, then, that I prefer to use the idea of "reconfiguration of the political opportunity structure", in order to understand the impact of action, including naming. By successfully imposing the name "Aboriginal peoples", this nationalist movement shifted points of access for

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[15] The analysis of the impact of naming choices for three nationalist movements is presented in Jenson (1995: 116ff).

[16] Those who write of making opportunities primarily use a language of success: opportunities are expanded for the leading group and even for weaker groups, opportunities are created for opponents, and opportunities are made for elites to undertake reform (Tarrow 1996: 58ff). Three of the four are clearly "successes".

claims-making, altered alignments of support and changed alliance patterns across social movement groups as well as within state institutions. The movement was reshaping the structure of opportunities, including perhaps its most "external" and "stable" components, the institutions of political decision-making.

Naming and the political opportunity structure

The demonstration of this argument proceeds in three steps. The first is to present a case in which there is evidence of reconfiguration of the political opportunity structure that can be linked to naming practices. This example is that of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada and their recent effects on the political opportunity structure at the federal level. The second case provides a counter-example. The story of the women's movement in France in the 1960s and 1970s illustrates that naming pratices do not necessarily challenge existing forms of access, alignments, or allies. The third step identifies some conditions under which some naming pratices might lead to a reconfiguration of the political opportunity structure, while others do not.

i - Aboriginal peoples in federal politics

This case demonstrates that the choice of a name made a significant contribution to reconfiguring the political opportunity structure, even though the Aboriginal nationalist movement did not achieve its major goals in the rounds of constitutional politics in the 1980s and the 1990s. The next few paragraphs do not intend to explain the actions of indigneous people in Canada as they created new social movement organisations in the late 1960s and 1970s, their learning from other social movements, the political opportunity structure they

confronted at the time, or the reasons for which they finally reached some consensus around the new name of "Aboriginal peoples". That is another story. Rather, the purpose is simply to provide sufficient background to allow me to proceed to the analysis of the consequences for the political opportunity structure.

Beginning in the late 1960s, indigenous peoples living in Canada began to reassert their historic claims to the status of nations. The immediate provocation to intensified action was the announcement of a draconion assimilationist - or "termination" - policy by the federal government in 1969 (Weaver 1981: 4).[17] Also important was a growing recognition that economic development by the private and public sectors was reaching far into the North, where many Aboriginal communities live (Morse 1984: 702ff). These public and private actions provoked an unprecedented upsurge of nationalism (Weaver 1981: 5; 43).[18]

Initially there was some uncertainty about naming. For example, the organisation of status Indians created in 1968 first called itself the National Indian Brotherhood. However, by early 1980s "Indians" had replaced what had begun as an outside-named term with their preferred First Nations and were grouped in the Assembly of First Nations. This organisation had become the bearer of claims to self-government and self-determination. The nationalist representation was used by many more groups than the AFN through these years. For example, the Dene began their 1975 Declaration by saying: "We the Dene of the Northwest Territories insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation". On the other side of the country, the James Bay Cree communities battling hydro-electric development on their lands began to speak in the name of the Cree nation. The Métis re-valorised their 19th-century name,

[17] The White paper proposed to eliminate anything that smacked of "special treatment" (for example, treaty rights) for Indians, in the name of making them "equal citizens".

[18] Weaver presents the details of these mobilisations (1981: 202).

and the Métis Nation started its organisational charter with the declaration that "Métis nationalism is Canadian nationalism".[19]

The organisations making these nation-based claims were the institutional expressions of grassroots mobilisation occurring across the country, frequently but not exclusively around land use and ownership issues, as well as, by the early 1980s, constitutional matters. As land claim cases made their way through the courts, the latter provided support for these naming practices. Beginning in 1973, in the Calder decision, the Supreme Court of Canada recognised the existence of Aboriginal title in common law (Morse 1984: 629). At almost the same time, the James Bay controversy in Quebec began to move towards resolution when the courts recognised that the Cree held Aboriginal title to their ancestral lands. The government of Quebec could not simply treat the lands as if they belonged to the Crown.

By the late 1970s, two things were happening. There was a new unity emerging among indigenous peoples, reflected in the mingling of cultural and religious symbols and in the taking of a new name: Aboriginal peoples. This name gained recognition from the state, after a hard political struggle, in the 1982 Constitution. Sections 25 and 35 entrenched the collective rights of three Aboriginal peoples: the Indians, the Inuit and the Métis.

The umbrella form of the name - Aboriginal - encouraged some common mobilisation. The second term - peoples - announced a shared and recognised claim to being nations.[20] The movement routed its claims in ways which eventually affected the substance of political debate and institutions of representation in the political opportunity structure. Nation-based names directed claims along two routes to representation and obliterated a third. Effectively closed off by this choice was the electoral route.

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[19] Ash provides the declarations of the AFN, the Métis and the Dene (1993: Appendices).

[20] On this claim, the Inuit were somewhat less clearly involved. Nonetheless, the Inuit stood firmly for recognition of the inherent right to self-government.

In the 1970s and through the 1980s the political parties, especially the Liberals and New Democrats, courted Aboriginal candidates in some regions. Despite this openness on the part of potential allies, temptation to use the electoral route was resisted by movement activists. They feared it would undermine actions appropriate to the name First Nations and Aboriginal peoples and the claim to inherent - and therefore non-extinguished - constitutional rights.[21]

The nationalist movement instead concentrated on routing its claims through the courts, seeking further recognition of Aboriginal title for land claims and increasingly putting pressure on the federal government to recognise the cultural genocide behind the physical and sexual violence which terrorised so many youngsters forced into residential schools in the postwar years.[22] Social movement organisations made constitutional claims in the name of their nations. They demanded and received standing as constitutional actors. In order to reach agreement on repatriating the Constitution from the British Parliament in 1982, federal and provincial governments succumbed to pressure from Aboriginal organisations, and entrenched a guarantee to convene constitutional conferences to address outstanding issues of Aboriginal rights. Three conferences took place in the mid-1980s but adjourned without success in 1988. They were

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[21] The work of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing as well as reaction to its report provide good examples of this process. The RCERPF's major theme was the need to revitalise the federal party system, which had suffered a serious loss of representational capacity over the years (Dobrowolsky and Jenson 1993). Included in this was an initiative, "subcontracted" to a small group of Aboriginal politicians, to develop recommendations for Aboriginal constituencies, which would overcome the representational weaknesses of a dispersed population. Despite the unusual amount of "special treatment" and recognition such constituencies would involve, the recommendation sank like a stone in the early 1990s. It was either rejected or simply ignored by those who were awaiting the report of another commission, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, that everyone expected to recommend new institutions of self-government.

[22] On January 7, 1998 the Canadian government made an historic "statement of reconciliation", expressing its "profound regret" for the horrors of the residential schools. This is the one major victory the movement has been able to wrest from the state, in the long months since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples brought down its report in the Fall of 1996. The statement does reflect the government's acceptance of the legitimacy of the preferred name of the movement. It begins: "As Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians seek to move forward together in a process of renewal, it is essential that we deal with the legacies of the past affecting the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including the First Nations, Inuit and Métis". The statement was dismissed as inadequate by a significant number of activists (*Globe and Mail*, 8 January 1998). Moreover, despite the long negotiations which produced it, the statement still reflects the government's longstanding preference to name Aboriginal peoples as Canadians, rather than the language of, for example, the Royal Commission which describes all persons living in Canada as "of this land".

followed by mounting claims for recognition. As nations, living in a multinational country, Aboriginal peoples were claiming the right of nations to self-determination. These claims received their most elaborate expression in the 1996 Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) whose vision was driven by the principle of self-determination, and therefore the requirement that "all governments in Canada recognize that Aboriginal peoples are nations vested with right of self-determination" (Abele 1997: 76).

This representation of themselves as nations clearly exposes the fact that choice of a name is an action with consequences for the movement. Speaking as Aboriginal peoples with national rights to self-determination, the social movement organisations redrew boundaries that blurred distinctions among nations and communities and allowed them sometimes to speak in the name of all nations and communities living in Canada. Of course, differences were never so blurred as to eliminate the fact that the nations and communities are very distinct and have their own representatives institutions. Movement organisations could, however, represent and gain recognition for a collectivity which had previously gone unrecognised. This naming practice also made claims meaningful; the inherent right to self-government is founded on this nationalism. Aboriginal peoples in Canada retrieved the history of encounter between the Crown and Indian nations, a retrieval which was helped by the courts' willingness to call certain fundamental documents, such as the Royal Proclamation of 1763, a nation-to-nation agreement. Without the capacity to represent history in such terms, Aboriginal peoples would have had to present a demand simply for devolution of power, for administrative adjustments, or for greater access to political institutions. An inherent right to self-government is a claim only a nationalist movement can make.[23]

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[23] There are some difficulties inherent in this claim. For example, self-government traditionally requires a territory. Since Aboriginal peoples have no single, contiguous territory and many have no land at all (urban indigenous peoples who are a mounting percentage of the whole), it is very complicated to "imagine" the institutional form of self-government. The RCAP report explicitly took on this issue but the inherent difficulty makes it hard to resist pressure to dissolve such claims into little more than administrative devolution. Several provinces are trying to do so with health care, policing, education, and so on and the federal government has also followed this strategy (Abele 1997: 76).

The consequences of this action of naming go beyond the practices of the movement. They are also evident in the structures within which the movement acts. The naming actions of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada contributed to changes in the political opportunity structure's three components: access, alignment and allies.

Naming practices shifted the substance of constitutional discussion. Instead of being about the division of powers in federalism, an agenda driven by the Quebec nationalist movement's claims for expanded powers and recognition, constitutional discussions covered issues of Aboriginal self-government and reached the very definition of Canada. Canadians had long held a dualistic view of history, emphasizing the joint founding by France and England, by French and English-Canadians to produce a bilingual country of francophones and anglophones. This vision was challenged by the nationalism of Aboriginal peoples and gave rise to a discourse of "three nations". At the same time, the agenda of Quebec's nationalist movement was downgraded from the central issue to simply one among several. Indeed, the very name of the relevant part of the political opportunity structure had altered from being federal-provincial negotiations to being "constitutional politics".

This shift was institutionalised by new points of *access* and opening to more actors. The Constitution and division of powers had always been discussed in intergovernmental institutions. As Aboriginal peoples pushed their claims, these institutions changed. In 1982 Aboriginal peoples had been recognised as constitutional actors, but at the time they shared the limelight of recognition with other movements, such as the women's movement. However, when the constitutionally mandated conferences brought together the eleven governments and representatives of Aboriginal associations, a new institution was under construction. This institution, rather than the intergovernmental and closed-door negotiations which had generated the 1982 and the 1987 Meech Lake compromises, became the model for constitutional negotiations in 1991-92. The four major organisations representing Aboriginal peoples sat alongside governments, around what had become a constitutional rather than an intergovernmental table. As the negotiations became a site for recognition, other actors clamoured for their own place at the table. For example, the National Action Committee on the

Status of Women (NAC), the major organisation of the women's movement, unsuccessfully pressed for standing as well.

The processes of constitutional politics also changed. As non-governmental actors, albeit those making "government-like" claims, gained a seat at the table, the closed-door negotiating practices of federal-provincial relations became more difficult to sustain. Canadians were presented with televised negotiating sessions which began with sweetgrass burning alongside the opening speeches of politicians. If governmental delegations had few choices but to boycott or condemn negotiations they did not approve of, representatives of Aboriginal organisations could use protest tactics to press their claims. The Grand Chief of the AFN and his colleagues organised demonstrations outside the gates when the intergovernmental negotiators held sessions without them. The boundary between the diplomacy of intergovernmental politics and the protest tactics of movements blurred.

Organisations representing the Aboriginal nationalist movement treated the media differently than did traditional politicians. They gave out more information. Most generally, the process was much more open, accessible to ordinary Canadians who became spectators of the "inside deals". This made it even harder to reach agreement.

As social movement organisations representing the nationalist movement of Aboriginal peoples gained access to formal constitutional politics, the second dimension of the political opportunity structure began to shift. Since the late 1960s, *alignments* within federal-provincial relations tracked a centralisation/decentralisation cleavage. Quebec, which had long sought expanded jurisdiction within the federal division of powers, was frequently supported by the province of Alberta, and sometimes other western provinces, which resented the centralising tendencies of the federal government under the Trudeau Liberals. Ontario, the other large, central province, tended to play a mediating role between Quebec and the federal government. Politics in the 1970s was driven by this distinction between pro and anti-centralising provinces. This pattern of alignment effectively crumbled, however, in the face of the expanded agenda and

the arrival of non-governmental actors. Alignments were unstable. Decisions tended to be based on issue-by-issue agreements rather than stable and predictable positioning of the pro and anti-centralising elites (Pal and Seidle 1994).

A similar process of reconfiguration can be observed on the third dimension of the political opportunity structure, that of *alliances*. Patterns of alliance within federal politics were profoundly altered by the naming action of Aboriginal nationalists. They sought allies among progressive forces, appealing to themes familiar to these allies. For example, anti-colonialist and human rights discourses were used to make claims against the federal government's paternalistic treatment of status Indians and Inuit in the Indian Act. Simultaneously, Quebec's assertion of its particular right to recognition as a distinct society was put into question by Aboriginal peoples' demands for recognition. Abuse in prisons and residential schools were exposed as assaults on cultural survival, just as claims for separate justice systems and healing practices were proposed as solutions to the ills confronting Aboriginal communities. Utilisation of these long-standing progressive discourses meant that non-Aboriginal intellectual elites and leftwing governments began to find that they faced competing national claims, each using similar discourses. Recognition of Quebec's right to self-determination lost ground among progressive forces in other social movements which had supported it since the 1960s. As the Cree and Inuit in northern Quebec deployed their nationalist discourse to oppose Quebec's claim to sovereignty, allies began to choose sides, often taking that of the Aboriginal peoples over that of Quebec.

Because social movement and governmental elites could not support everyone making anti-imperialist claims and choices had to be made, the positioning of available allies inside the political opportunity structure altered. For example, in the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s, the government of Ontario had been a privileged interlocuteur for federalist nationalists in Quebec. However, as Aboriginal peoples increasingly made claims in terms of their own nationhood and as several Aboriginal nations resident in Quebec loudly and publicly expressed their fears of an independent Quebec, the Ontario government was squeezed between two movements making incompatible claims. The tension was magnified when the New Democrats took over the Ontario provincial government in 1990. That party, especially in that province, had

long harboured supporters of both Quebec's right to self-determination and of expanded Aboriginal rights. This tension was felt at the constitutional negotiations of 1991-92, as Premier Bob Rae forced his Quebec counterpart to accept the legitimacy of Aboriginal presence and claims (Pal and Seidle 1993).

None of this was inevitable. Another name would not have had the same effect. In the 1970s, a definition of "native people" as one of Canada's multicultural groups had been a distinct possibility, pushed by the state and other movements, although quickly rejected by indigenous organisations. Or, if indigenous peoples had continued through the 1980s to make claims on the party system, to seek access to existing governmental bodies - as they did in provincial politics - as individuals or interest groups, then this reconfiguration of the political opportunity structure for federal politics would probably not have occurred. However, once they insisted on speaking to the federal government and the courts as nations, seeking self-determination, they no longer could follow the electoral route. Once the name was adopted for these pan-Canadian bodies, logic and coherence dictated particular strategies for gaining access via the judicial and constitutional negotiation routes to representation. In turn, these actions helped transform the arcane and private world of federal-provincial negotiations into the high stakes and public world of constitutional politics. They also dealt another blow to the already weakened representational capacity of the federal party system, by-passed even more by the institutions of constitutional negotiations and by parallel mobilisation by social movements.

Nor was the reorganisation of alliances inevitable. If Aboriginal peoples had limited their claims to ones of social equality and equity, of community development and cultural survival, or even Aboriginal title, progressive allies within the political opportunity structure would not have been forced into these situations of choice or required to mediate between directly competing claims. The government of Quebec and many of its citizens would have continued to accept the claims of Aboriginal peoples living within their borders, as they did in in the 1980s. On 20 March 1985 by means of a Solemn Resolution the National Assembly of Quebec became the first government in Canada to recognise the presence and distinct identity of Aboriginal nations

living in Quebec. However, once the movements developed their nationalist discourse further and used that action to confront the Quebec nationalist movement, a reconfiguration of alliance patterns was virtually foreordained.

On all three dimensions of the political opportunity structure we can observe the consequences of the decision of Aboriginal peoples living in Canada to represent themselves with a nationalist identity and to define their interests as nation-based. The political opportunity structure was profoundly altered by this movement, whose action undermined longstanding couplets: French and English; Quebec and the rest of Canada. This naming action also contributed to the destruction of institutional practices, including treating constitutional politics as primarily about the division of powers in federalism and functioning exclusively by closed-door negotiations. Future constitutional negotiators will be pressed to maintain a broad agenda and greater openness.[24]

ii - a counter-example: the entry of the French women's movement into the political opportunity structure

Given the story just told, one might well ask whether the notion that social movements reconfigure their political opportunity structures through their naming actions ought not be immediately added to the theoretical repertoire of students of social movements. Here I think caution is in order. Analysis of other social movements and their relationship to the political opportunity structure demonstrates that this is not always the case.

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[24] For example, in the hope of reducing the appeal of sovereignty in Quebec, in September 1997 nine of the 10 Premiers signed the Calgary Declaration defining Quebec as "a unique society". This action was immediately assailed as excluding the agenda of Aboriginal peoples; the Premiers had to quickly organise another high-level meeting with Aboriginal organisations and make an additional statement.

To illustrate, I will use the case of the French women's movement which came into existence in the late 1960s. This movement also experienced a certain amount of uncertainty about the name under which it would make its claims, but by the 1970s there was a widespread agreement across all tendencies of the movement that it spoke for "women".

Alternatives had existed, been assessed and then discarded as a result of movement mobilisation and its relationships with its allies. For example, the Communists, who were a major player in the egalitarian wing of the movement, traditionally spoke of *la condition féminine* (the situation of women) and made distinctions among women, classifying them as working women, bourgeoise, and so on.[25] The first representation led to a kind of structuralist victimisation stance while the second explicitly limited the movement's "reach" to those social forces in France not directly aligned with state monopoly capitalism. All of this was consistent with the Communist Party's general theoretical position at the time. Nonetheless, by the late 1970s even the Communists, in their Eurocommunism, had embraced the name "women" promoted by movement activists within the Party.

A second possible name which was quickly limited to a small group was that of "feminist". A core group within the revolutionary wing of the movement had declared in the earliest assemblies of women that feminism was dead, *dépassé*, and not worthy of attention from *femmes en mouvement*. Finally, and despite the high levels of discord and outright conflict which characterised the French movement, activists nonetheless eventually coalesced around the name *mouvement de la libération des femmes* (MLF). This resulted in an umbrella-like representation, recognisable to a broad constituency, which grounded the various claims which the revolutionary, syndicalist and egalitarian wings of the movement made.

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[25] Jenson (1990) provides a description of the wings of the movement and their major naming and claiming practices. See that for all references to the literature on this movement.

The French women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on claiming cultural recognition, reproductive rights, and better institutional representation. Not all wings participated in making all three of these claims, but overall there was a focus on these three. Although the claims constituted fundamental challenges to existing politics, in no case did naming actions constitute a serious challenge to the structure of political opportunities.

There are two basic reasons for this. The first is that the French movement of the 1970s was distinguished from its counterparts in many countries by a strong revolutionary wing which displayed almost zero interest in addressing the state. For reasons having to do with its own origins and history in the far Left of the late 1960s, political action, including electoral action, was very low on the agenda of the strongest wing. Therefore, much of the movement simply failed to engage with the political opportunity structure of traditional institutions and, hardly surprisingly, had little impact on it. A second reason for the non-contribution to changing the structure is that those parts of the movement - the syndicalist and egalitarian wings with their links to unions and parties - that did choose to engage in ordinary politics, did so in well-known ways.

On the dimension of *access*, both the syndicalist and egalitarian wings made claims to existing institutions for greater access for women. Unions and parties were pressed to treat women's concerns seriously, and to promote women who could speak in the name of women. Women did gain some access as a result of this mobilisation, but when they acted, as women or even as feminists, within these institutions, their actions were assimilated to on-going organisational practices. Thus, women's commissions were expanded in those parties which had them, created where they did not exist or disbanded so women could participate in ordinary political fora, in the cases in which women criticised their ghettoisation.[26] At the same time,

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[26] The Communists and the union confederation close to it did the first, the Socialists did the second, while the other major union confederation, the CFDT, adopted the third position. Each choice resulted from the particular mix of internal ideational and organisational factors.

unions and parties as well as state feminists added policies to deal with gender discrimination, and women's "special needs" to their policy platforms and actions.

In these years, *alignment* patterns were propitious for the movement. Electoral politics in Fifth Republic France was shifting from a system characterised by a strong centre and competition among many parties, to a bipolar division between Left and Right, with each "family" divided into two major subcomponents. This political situation was superimposed on a moment of social change as women's labour force participation rates rose. The result was serious competition for women's votes between the presidential candidate of the Left, François Mitterrand after 1965, and various rightwing presidents. In this situation, a threat by women coming from the movement to boycott elections was serious indeed (Jenson and Sineau 1996: Part I). Not surprisingly candidates scrambled to integrate women's demands into their electoral platform.

There were also readily available *allies* for the women's movement. These existed within the state, where state feminists had been working since the mid-1960s to foster greater attention to gender discrimination in the workplace and the need for equality within the family. Allies also existed in the major institutions of representation, especially the parties and unions, among progressive forces which were seeking to advance their own agendas of democratisation and new politics. For example, both the CFDT which in the 1970s was still oriented by its workers' control ideology, and reformers within the CGT seeking a more democratic and autonomous unionism, reached out to the women's movement. They opened the doors of the unions to women's concerns, which then became a symbol of their own progressive identity.

The point here is not to downplay the importance - nor ultimately the meagre success - of the collective action of French women. It is rather to stress that access, alignment patterns, and allies were all arrayed so as to encourage integration within an existing structure rather than a significant challenge to the structure of political opportunities.

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Thinking of what might have been - or in this case, what yet may be - is helpful. The women's movement might have behaved, and is beginning to behave, differently. In recent years a movement for *parité* has begun to take hold in France as well as several other European countries. With the support of the European Network on Women in Decision-Making, several declarations have entered the public domain which express the position of this movement. For example, the November 1992 Declaration of Athens said this about women and power: "a democratic system must assure equal participation by its citizens in public and political life. ... Women represent half the population. Equality requires parity in the representation and administration of countries." The May 1996 Charter of Rome, a preparatory document for the European Union's Intergovernmental Conference of 1997, similarly called for recognition of parity.

The movement has deep roots in France (Gaspard *et al.* 1992 provides a sort of manifesto). In a November 1993 action reminiscent of the movement for abortion rights in the early 1970s, a *Manifeste des 577 pour une démocratie paritaire* was published and in June 1996, 10 female ministers and ex-ministers published the *Manifeste des 10 pour la parité*. Activists explicitly represent their actions as a movement, and as the heir of earlier movements for "alternative politics" (Gaspard 1994).[27]

Such actions provide a new representation of women. The movement for *parité* is fundamentally a movement for presence. Activists insist on the fundamental and unbridgeable distinction between the sexes, arguing that this difference merits recognition in the body politic. In this naming practice all women are treated as equivalents, with no distinction based on their economic or social status or to their ideological preferences. All that matters is the female presence everywhere where decisions are made. Thus, the major French *parité* activists, who come from the Socialist Party and centre-Left, found themselves having to protest in 1996 when

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[27] *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* in two issues in 1994 (vol. 15, #4) and 1995 (vol. 16, #1) presented the debate raging within the women's movement about the wisdom of seeking *parité*.

the rightwing Prime Minister, Alain Juppé, dropped almost all the female members of his Cabinet. He had originally appointed a record number of women, in response to the attention which the *parité* discourse had in the 1995 presidential election.

Rather than calling for quotas or other forms of affirmative action to encourage better access of women to elected assemblies, the movement for *parité* starts from the assumption that society is composed of two equal groups, and each deserves full representation. This reformulation of the longstanding claim of the women's movement for political space is more challenging to the political opportunity structure than earlier formulations, even those of radical feminism. It provides an image of society as inevitably cleaved by sex, and calls for a political recognition of this. Where workers and employers have parity commissions (*commissions paritaires*), activists of the women's movement call for sex-based parity. Thus, it competes with other representations of society, particularly those which privilege class relations, and that have long provided the foundational principles for the French political opportunity structure. While it is still too early to judge whether such a shift will occur, the potential for organisational and institutional reconfiguration is there.

Why reconfiguration? Why not?

This article began by identifying some confusion associated with the concept of political opportunity structure, arguing this was related to the linear causal reasoning generally employed in social movement studies. Initial scepticism led to a proposal to reason in terms of structuration, putting the emphasis on action within structures rather than on trying to distinguish internal from external opportunities. This analytic stance assumes actors to be making structures. Therefore it focusses on processes, including those involving identity work, and on representational practices, including deployment of cultural symbols, within those processes. While one of the cases examined here involves a movement primarily participating in the reproduction of the political opportunity structure, in the other case the naming action of the

movement contributed to a reconfiguration of both the institutional forms and representational practices of the structure.

These two cases do not provide sufficient evidence for hard and fast conclusions about the conditions under which social movement action, in particular the selection of a name, might reconfigure the political opportunity structure. Nonetheless, some factors can be identified. Very relevant is the effect of a choice of a name on access. When Aboriginal peoples named themselves as nations, they sought access through the courts and constitutional politics. This route to representation is sensitive to discourses drawn from "first principles". There is little room for multiplication of names and compromise that some other routes, particularly the electoral one, might provide. In the case of the French women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, it was either non-engaged or used a route to representation that by-passed party and electoral politics. Multiplication of claimants and integration of new ones was normal to French leftwing parties. They had a long tradition of using a categorical "and the discourse" (example: "the workers, and the peasants, and the women, and the immigrants, and the ... all support our party"). Women's claims could be assimilated within the existing structure without challenging it.

Such multiplication was not possible in Canada, however, once Aboriginal peoples' representation of themselves as nations gained widespread acceptance. Indeed, throughout 1991-92 the four organisations representing Aboriginal peoples which had access to the negotiating table fought off claims for access coming from the association representing Aboriginal women. As representatives of nations, they could not accommodate to categorical principles of inclusion.

Activists for the movement for *parité* are aware of the importance of routes to representation. In what is something of an innovation for French politics, they are stressing the importance of the courts. Some activists promote a constitutional amendment based on the equality clause of the Constitution. They also propose a referendum. Others seek an organic law. Appeals to the Constitution and a referendum allow the movement to bypass the parties and

other traditional institutions of representation.[28] Moreover, from the beginning they have been willing to use the power of "Europe" - and the resources of the Commission - to mobilise legitimacy outside the French political structures.

Closely linked to this first factor is a second which is the extent to which naming practices constitute a challenge to settled visions of social relations, around which political structures took form in the past. Even the revolutionary and autonomous wing of the French women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s were profoundly attached to a vision of society divided into Left and Right, and the importance of class relations. Thus, despite having a seemingly all-encompassing name, there was always a tendency to shade it with an adjective which corresponded to partisan categories, such as Socialist women, working women, rightwing women. Those parts of the movement which refused to use these categories were also the one which refused to have any dealings with everyday politics and which systematically eschewed "reformist" engagement with the state.[29]

The movement for *parité*, however, self-consciously rejects partisan distinctions, celebrating or decrying equally the promises of right and leftwing politicians. This practice may become as destabilising as was the tendency of Aboriginal nationalists to divide the world into two - Aboriginal and not - along the line of social cleavage which had never before been important in the political opportunity structure. As has been argued here, when this distinction was inserted into political discourse, existing categories blurred and new institutional forms emerged.

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[28] For a quick presentation of the principal issues and goals of the movement see the 16 page brochure entitled "La parité des femmes et des hommes dans la vie politique", jointly prepared by the groups Démocratie-Parité and Parité-Infos in January 1996.

[29] Gisèle Halimi is one of France's "historic feminists" and the author of the recent report by the *Observatoire de la Parité entre les hommes et les femmes*, established by President Chirac after the 1995 elections. She places the blame for the tiny percentage of women elected in France at the door of the feminists of earlier decades who "translated 'political power' as 'power over'... and refused to dirty their hands and participate in this sad patriarchal feast", *Le Monde*, 7 March 1997.

Thirdly, the issue of historical time can help account for the differences. The second-wave of the French women's movement rose in the late 1960s and was in decline by the end of the next decade. In other words, it emerged out of and into a political opportunity structure in which the organisations and ideologies of postwar French politics were still in place. In the case of both Aboriginal nationalists and the movement for *parité*, economic turbulence and restructuring had already put issues of national identity on the table. The French who faced the building of "Europe" and the Canadians who confronted the dangers of NAFTA were already asking questions about their national identity and fundamental social relations of solidarity. In cases when so much is already on the table, even weak movements may contribute to a reconfiguration of the political opportunity structure.

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