The link between social movements and corporate social initiatives: Toward a multi-level theory

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Abstract: This article offers a first step towards a multi-level theory linking social movements to corporate social initiatives. In particular, building on the premise that social movements reflect ideologies that direct behavior inside and outside organizations, this essay identifies mechanisms by which social movements induce firms to engage with social issues. First, social movements are able to influence the expectations that key stakeholders have about firms' social responsibility, making corporate social initiatives more attractive. Second, through conflict or collaboration, they shape firms' reputation and legitimacy. And third, social movements' ideologies manifest inside corporations by triggering organizational members' values and affecting managerial cognition. The essay contributes to the literatures on social movements and CSR, extends understanding of how ideologies are manifested in movement-business interactions, and generates rich opportunities for future research.

Keywords: social movements; social movement organizations; activism; corporate social initiatives; CSR; corporate social responsibility; ideology; multilevel theory

Introduction

Increasing social pressure concentrates on steering firms toward practices that transcend narrow economic objectives and contribute to the resolution of social ills and the attainment of social prosperity. At the same time, the question of whether firms should respond to non-economic concerns remains a matter of ongoing dispute and a frequent topic of discussion in the voluminous research on corporate social responsibility, corporate sustainability, and adjacent areas (Caroll and Shabana, 2010; Margolis, Elfenbein and Walsh, 2009; Porter and van der Linde, 1996). However, as scholars engage in these inherently normative quests, and as widespread acceptance of a business paradigm that reconciles such expectations with the dominant economic logic remains a distant ideal[1], evidence suggests that firms are investing in corporate social initiatives at increasing rates (Margolis and Walsh, 2003).

The social forces that drive firms to proceed to such investments are still not well understood. In particular, little attention has been paid to how social movements lead firms to engage in corporate social initiatives. Social movements reflect ideologies that direct behavior inside and outside organizations (Zald, 2000), in the workplace as well as in civil society (Spicer and Böhm, 2007). But although sociologists have studied social movements extensively and organizational scholars have identified activists as able to prevent irresponsible practices by directly targeting firms, we know relatively little about how they induce corporate social initiatives (Den Hond and de Bakker, 2007; Soule, 2009).

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[1] This is evident both in practice, as "few managers today can publicly question [the dictum] that their job is to maximize shareholder value" (Ghoshal, 2005; 79), and in management scholarship, with the "the prominence of performance, productivity, and efficiency as the dependent variables of most interest" (Pfeffer, 2016:4).

In this article I draw on social movement theory to offer the first step towards an integrative theoretical account that explains *how social movements influence firms' propensity to engage in social initiatives*. In particular, the article builds on Zald's (2000) perspective of social movements' as ideologically structured action. This perspective relies on the assumption that the grievances that give rise to social movements, and movements' conceptions about society are ideological in nature; i.e. they are fundamentally related to ideas about *how society should be,* and this includes ideas about the role of business. In addition, Zald's perspective suggests that social movements reflect ideologies that manifest directly or indirectly at different levels of analysis. Therefore, to better understand the relationship between social movements and corporate social initiatives, I review the relevant literature and identify individual, organizational, and field level mechanisms that underlie this relationship.

This essay suggests multiple mechanisms by which movements can induce such initiatives. First, at the level of the organizational field, social movement campaigns and the use of framing by social movement organizations elicit support from other critical stakeholders, which in turn expect or even demand from firms to engage with social issues. Second, at the organizational level, social movement activists attack firms or collaborate with them to shape corporate reputation and legitimacy, modifying the costs and benefits of engaging in social initiatives. And third, at the individual level, social movements affect managers' cognition and movement ideas manifest inside corporations in the form of organizational members' value orientations. The three levels of analysis are of course not independent, suggesting interactions among the identified mechanisms through cross-level linkages. Overall, this research offers a step towards an integrative theory of how social movements matter for firms, and in particular why they matter for the study of corporate social initiatives.

This article contributes to the literatures on social movements and CSR. Despite the growing literature on firm-movement interactions (De Bakker, den Hond, King and Weber, 2013; King and Pearce, 2010), we know little about how they induce corporate social initiatives. Understanding such initiatives within the context of social movement action offers important benefits to CSR research. Indeed, although less utilized in the CSR literature, social movement theory provides a useful foundation to draw upon that complements stakeholder theory (Eesley and Lenox, 2006) and the neo-institutionalist approach (Campbell, 2005) because it pays more attention to the *mechanisms* by which activists enact corporate or institutional change. Moreover, this study extends our understanding of how ideologies are manifested in movement-business interactions (Zald, 2000) by elaborating on how movement ideologies translate into corporate action in the form of social initiatives. As discussed in the concluding section, a tentative contribution of this essay is to stakeholder theory, as the analysis uncovers how social movements shape the saliency of other stakeholders. Lastly, by providing a first step towards a multilevel theory that links social movements with corporate social initiatives, this article generates rich opportunities for future research.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. I first give an overview of the theoretical background that motivates this study by briefly discussing research on social movements and work on corporate social initiatives. Then, I synthesize prior work in these two distinct fields to develop arguments showing how they are linked at multiple levels of analysis. Finally, I conclude the essay by discussing its contributions, limitations, as well as the avenues for future inquiry that it gives rise to.

Background and definitions

Social movements

"Social movements" are defined as "coalitions that engage in sustained action to promote ideas and preferences for changing prominent social, cultural and business practices" (adopted from McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Weber and Soderstrom, 2012). This definition stresses characteristics that scholars tend to associate with most social movements: that they emerge out of some form of dissatisfaction which they strive to redress; that they are usually collective enterprises; that they are tied together by a common purpose or ideology; and that they are characterized by some degree of continuity (as opposed to isolated protest events) (Crossley, 2002; Soule, 2009; Zald, 2000). Illustrative exemplars of social movements include the much-studied civil rights, women's, environmental, and social justice movements. But movements tend to form around more narrow areas as well; consider for example the animal rights movement, the anti-sweatshop movement, the fair trade movement, and the fossil-fuel divestment movement, among others. As explained below, the centrality of ideology for social movements has implications for their role not only in society, but also in the economy. But before expanding on this, I offer an overview of perspectives on social movements that are important for what is to follow.

One important perspective for understanding social movements has been the resource mobilization view (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). This theory has stressed the role of social movement organizations (SMOs) – complex, or formal, organizations which identify with a movement and attempt to implement its goals (McCarthy and Zald, 1977) - as groups that mobilize resources in order to gain access to polity and encourage further mobilization by movement supporters (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, 1996). Such organizations – sometimes in the form of NGOs – serve as mobilizing structures that activists can use to exercise their

influence. They provide activists with the organizational structure that is necessary for the formulation of plans and the coordination of action, which may include protests, marches, lawsuits, and various other social movement tactics. A second perspective on social movements that is important for the purposes of this essay builds on the notion of social movement framing (Snow and Benfort, 1992). In contrast to the focus on the structure of mobilization, this view emphasizes culture and social construction; in particular, it argues that the way social movements frame their message will ultimately impact the outcome of their efforts. A "frame" is defined as "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions" (Snow and Benford, 1992: 137). Movements frame issues and solutions in a way that increases their resonance with other key stakeholders and shapes audience interpretations to the movements' advantage, as meaning can be "negotiated, contested, modified" (Benford, 1997).

In all essence, while resources matter a great deal for whether social movement organizations will achieve their goals, movement influence is rarely void of meaning and ideological content. Indeed, in an inspiring essay, Mayer Zald (2000) suggested an enlarged agenda for the study of social movements, a perspective that views movement behavior as ideologically structured: "guided and shaped by ideological concerns-belief systems" (Zald, 2000:3-4). The recognition of movements as ideologically structured action is not in contrast to other prevailing theories of social movements; rather, in the words of Zald, it merely "makes more explicit what has been implicit" (Zald, 2000:13). Zald's perspective builds on the resource mobilization view in the importance it affords to the collective nature of movements, and on the framing perspective by accepting the idea of social construction that can be used – sometimes strategically – by movements to 'craft' or 'frame' resonance with other actors.

Ideology is clearly central to this perspective. For the purposes of this paper, "ideology" is defined as "a system of beliefs about the social world, how it operates, and how it should operate that is shared by members of a group and used to interpret, justify, and guide action" (Wilson, 1973; Van Dijk, 1998; Zald, 2000). Because ideologies are seen as systems of beliefs or thoughts, they have to be located in people's minds, and thus belong to what psychologists typically call cognition (Wilson, 1973; Van Dijk, 1998). They serve as a cognitive map that guides understanding of reality and justifies or motivates action based on moral or evaluative principles (Oliver and Johnston, 2000). But ideologies are also social, in that they tend to be collectively shared – they exist in some way apart from the individual mind – and are often associated with group interests, conflicts and struggle (Van Dijk, 1998; Oliver and Johnston, 2000). Given the importance of ideologies for the way actors understand the role of corporations in society, Mayer Zald's perspective of social movements, as described above, appears suitable for exploring social movements' influence on corporate social initiatives.

Before we begin to understand this relationship, though, it is important to pause and address a fundamental question: why in the first place would social movements be linked to corporate social initiatives, or more generally to corporations? For all their rich history, social movements had in fact initially received little attention as actors with claims over business policy (Van Dyke, Soule and Taylor, 2004). Yet, over the last few decades, two related trends led scholars to begin examining corporations as targets of social movements. First, the rising power, reach, and prominence of large corporations along with recent trends in deregulation and privatization led to a decline in the willingness or even ability of states to monitor corporate activity (Böhm, Dinerstein and Spicer, 2010; Crossley, 2003; King and Pearce, 2010; Ulrich and Sarasin, 1995). With economic activity generously freed from state control, the scale of markets

increased, as did the need for social control. Second, social movement organizations have proliferated over the past few decades, and started to bypass the state and directly engage with firms in their attempts to bring about societal change (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004; King and Pearce, 2010; Van Dyke *et al.*, 2004).[2]

It is argued here that one of the defining characteristics of social movements is largely responsible for the observation that they permeate corporate policy. While social movements have diverse goals and values, what is common to all movements is "a vision of what a society is and should be", an ideology (Garner, 1995; 70). A vision of society cannot but include economic life, and even movements that tend to direct their grievances at individuals or the state have expectations about corporate policy. The ideology of the women's movement is predicated on the idea of gender equality; by this vision, firms *should* treat men and women in the same way (Garner, 1995). The ideology of the environmental movement is predicated on the protection of the natural environment; by this vision, firms *should* limit their engagement with activities that result in pollution (Hoffman, 2001). The ideology of the human rights movement is predicated on ideas about people's right to life, liberty, and freedom from oppression; by this vision, firms *should not* engage in economic activity in oppressive nation states (Soule, Swaminathan, and Tihanyi, 2014).[3] The moral component of social movement ideologies stands in contrast to the ideology that dominates much of economic life, the view that the business of business is business, free of moral or normative considerations (see Ulrich, 2008: 376). Despite this apparent conflict and the promotion of ethical or more socially beneficial business practices by social

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[2] For a historical overview of social movements see Tilly and Wood (2009). For recent reviews of the relationship between social movements and firms see De Bakker *et al.* (2013), or Soule (2009).

[3] Analogous arguments can be offered for other social movements, such as the fair trade movement, the disability rights movement, several indigenous people's movements, the anti-plastics movement, etc.

movements (Doh and Guay, 2006), we know relatively little about how movements spark corporate social initiatives (Den Hond and De Bakker, 2007).

Corporate social initiatives

A "corporate social initiative" is broadly defined as "an initiative by which a firm engages in actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law" (McWilliams, Siegel and Wright, 2006: 1). The word "social" is used loosely here, as social initiatives can address a variety of issues, including but not limited to diversity, community development, promotion of education, labor standards, or environmental protection (Hawn and Ioannou, 2015; Howard-Grenville and Hoffman, 2003; Margolis and Walsh, 2003). Much of the literature mentions such initiatives simply as CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). However, the term "responsibility" implies a normative assessment. Since the focus here is not on the debate of what is (or not) the responsibility of corporations, and because firms may engage in initiatives unrelated to their operations and potential responsibility to society, I follow Margolis and Walsh (2003) in referring to them as corporate social initiatives.[4]

Margolis and Walsh (2003) noticed a staggering discrepancy between the dominant economic doctrine that sees profits as the sole purpose of businesses, and the increasing demands that companies face to engage in initiatives aimed at resolving social problems. As they suggest, this has led a 'generation of organizational scholars' to explore the question of whether corporate social initiatives have a positive, negative, or no significant impact on the economic performance of the corporation (e.g. Flammer, 2015; Hawn and Ioannou, 2015; Margolis et al., 2009).

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[4] Others have used the concept of corporate social action (Marquis, Glynn and Davis, 2007; Roulet and Touboul , 2014), which I see as equivalent.

Building on this work, other scholars later focused on moderators that determine *when* such initiatives will pay off for firms (see Margolis, Elfenbein and Walsh, 2009 for a review). Although many scholars have engaged with this topic, the focus on internal (to the firm) search for reasons to engage in social initiatives has left their institutional determinants rather underexplored (Brammer, Jackson and Matten, 2012; Roulet and Touboul, 2014).

Some scholars identify that broader institutional differences, cultural logics, or values can account for variations in how firms view corporate social initiatives and decide to engage in them (Matten and Moon, 2008; Roulet and Touboul, 2014). Within this area of institutional analysis, activists and NGOs start to gain a more prominent position as sources of influence on corporate social initiatives and other corporate practices. For instance, Doh and Guay (2006) discuss how NGO activism determines perceptions about the social responsibilities of corporations and suggest that civil society is increasingly influential for businesses. My search in the Factiva database shows that the co-occurrence of instances of corporate social initiatives and references to activism has been on the rise in recent years (see Figure 1), indicating that social movements and CSR increasingly appear together, at least in discourse. At the same time, research has viewed activists as watchdogs that are able to monitor corporations and indirectly regulate their policies, as transformers of consumer preferences, or as actors who function within the corporate hierarchy (Raeburn, 2004; Rao, 1998; Zald and Berger, 1978). How, then, do social movements – whose ideologies and actions manifest within and outside organizations – influence corporate social initiatives? To address this question, I offer below a multi-level theoretical account of the link between social movements and corporate social initiatives.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The link between social movements and social initiatives

This essay addresses the following research question: *how do social movements induce corporate social initiatives*? Because my interest is in addressing questions of 'how', I use mechanism-based theorizing (Davis and Marquis, 2005); that is, I focus on mechanisms rather than relationships. The articulation of mediating mechanisms or processes though to be responsible for a relationship is a key element of theory (Bacharach, 1989). Rather than the establishment of a relationship between *explanans* and *explanandum*, a mechanism is the specification of why, or how, the relationship between them holds (Bacharach, 1989; Whetten, 1989). That is, my main aim is to explicate how (the mechanisms by which) the actions of social movements ('input', or 'cause') can lead to corporate social initiatives ('output', or 'effect'). [5] By situating ideologically motivated actions that are often treated as independent within the scope of social movement activity, this essay is in a better position to offer the basic elements, and with them a foundation, for a multilevel theory linking social movements to corporate social initiatives.

As social movements have been primarily the subject of political science and sociological analyses (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Tilly and Wood, 2009), they are usually viewed as a source of macroscopic societal changes. Thus, this analysis starts from their broader role in society and takes a top-down approach to understanding their influence on firms. To answer my research question, I first identify mechanisms operating at the field-level, then proceed to the impact of social movements at the firm level, and finally discuss their role in shaping individual decisions.

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[5] This essay builds on the conception of a mechanism as the explanation of *how* two concepts relate to each other (Wheten, 1989; Bacharach, 1989). For related conceptions of mechanisms that underlie social systems more generally see Elster, (1989), Hedström and Swedberg (1996) and Mayntz (2004).

As the following discussion will show, these effects are intrinsically interrelated, and only if they are considered in tandem can they enable us to understand firms' decision to engage in corporate social initiatives. I elaborate on the mechanisms operating at each level below, and then discuss cross-level (micro-meso-macro) interactions. Figure 2 presents a parsimonious graphical depiction of the relationship under investigation.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Field-level mechanisms

Social movements influence business decisions by shaping the organizational field in which firms operate: the stakeholders that "constitute a recognized area of institutional life" (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983:148). They attempt to infuse their beliefs about the 'ideal' role of business in society – their ideological beliefs – into economic activity, and to modify public perceptions about the nature and responsibilities of business organizations. By forging connections between their causes and broader social issues and frames, such as human rights, fair wages, or public health (Levy and Scully, 2007; Spicer and Böhm, 2007), social movement actors shift the expectations of other critical stakeholders in firms' organizational fields, such as the general public, consumers, prospective employees, or regulators.

The public, an often powerful stakeholder for businesses, increasingly criticizes them for irresponsible behavior (Ulrich and Sarasin, 1995) and expects that they engage in social initiatives (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). But how does the public come to rely on these beliefs about the responsibility of business, and how do public expectations reach managers? Quite

often, it is social movements that both 'craft' and 'carry' these public expectations to firms. That is, grievances do not pre-exist for a social movement to come and take issue at, but they are (at least partly) constructed and interpreted by social movements (Benford and Snow, 2000). For example, some of the risks stemming from environmental problems, as well as their causes and potential solutions, are not necessarily 'objective' and often not immediately apparent to the broad public (Rucht, 1999). They have to be interpreted or framed as such in order for the public to support the ideas proffered by the environmental movement. Other social movements use strategic framing to fight for the resolution of social problems such as social exclusion, access to health, or inequality, and promote various solutions including corporate social initiatives. The more successful they are at mobilizing their supporters and bringing these issues to the public agenda, the more likely it is that they will influence the environment of business activity.

Public support for the causes of a social movement tends to be associated with a number of consequences for businesses. First, the expectations from business organizations shift, with firms being increasingly expected to invest in initiatives that benefit the local community, the environment, or other stakeholders. Social movements' framing efforts attach ideological beliefs to firms and markets (cf. Hensmans, 2003; Maurer, Bansal and Crossan, 2011; Weber, Heinze and DeSoucey, 2008) and change the norms of acceptable behavior and the taken-for-granted assumptions about what is legitimate behavior within an organizational field. As social movement activists mobilize by using collective action, using the media to attract attention, or through public educational initiatives, they theorize corporate social initiatives as part of normal business operations. Theorization entails the "justification of an abstract solution" (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002: 60), and specifies "what effects [a] practice will have, and why the practice is particularly applicable or needed" (Strang and Meyer, 1993: 500)". As a result, social

movements achieve support from sympathetic bystanders, and the adoption of such initiatives becomes more legitimate and diffuses faster within organizational fields (Strang and Soule, 1998).

Second, collective action on the part of activist organizations does not only have direct impact on the legitimacy of an organizational practice, but also an indirect effect on consumer interest. Consumers, one of the most critical stakeholders for any company, tend to favor organizations that engage in more socially responsible behavior and are more likely to purchase their products, or pay a premium for them. For example, a recent survey found that socially oriented retailers are better able to market Fair Trade products than companies that have a weaker CSR image because they elicit more trust and consequent willingness to pay on the part of consumers (Castaldo, Perrini, Misani and Tencati, 2009). This effect is not only limited to firms that engage directly with the public. Rather, activists increasingly scrutinize firms for the social performance of their suppliers. Thus, corporate buyers tend to prefer collaborating with firms that exhibit better social performance. While research in this area is still in its infancy, some evidence suggest that even when supply chains extend beyond national borders, customers "consider the social standards to which firms hold their suppliers in their buying decisions" (Ehrgott, Reimann, Kaufmann and Carter, 2011). Thus, firms perceived as more responsible benefit from consumer interest, even if this interest is delimited to some market niches.

Third, inasmuch as it can influence the values of the public, social movement activity can render firms that engage in social initiatives more attractive employers than others (by praising them, for instance, as CSR leaders). A series of studies have focused on the impact of corporate social performance (CSP) or perceived CSR on prospective employees' attitudes towards firms (Albinger and Freeman, 2000; Turban and Greening, 1997), and found that firms that appear to

be more socially responsible are more attractive employers. What is more, this result is more robust in the case of job seekers with many alternative job options, which suggests that socially responsible firms can attract the most qualified employees (Albinger and Freeman, 2000). Therefore, by shaping public perceptions social movements elicit indirect support from another important group of stakeholders: firms' potential employees.[6]

Finally, activists often induce policy changes that advance their goals, as indicated by the "burgeoning literature on the policy outcomes of social movements" (Van Dyke *et al.*, 2004: 31). By relying on social movement organizations that operate outside institutional channels of authority, or on insiders who have gained access to political positions, social movements have often been able to shape public policy (Santoro and McGuire, 1997; Georgallis, Dowell and Durand, 2014). Policy changes can shift business practices from the realm of CSR to normal operating behavior that is mandated by government policy. For instance, some diversity policies that were once at the discretion of companies and could – if adopted – be considered as social initiatives, have later been formalized by government as a result of movement struggles. In the U.S., African-Americans were faced with limited rights and racial segregation well into the 20th century, and the mobilization of civil rights activists in the 1960s led to federal action that formed the basis of affirmative action programs (Piven and Cloward, 1979; Santoro and McGuire, 1997). Similarly, feminist social movement organizations "disseminated information on wage inequities, provided technical assistance, lobbied elected officials, and organized publicity campaigns" that "played dominant roles in government adoption of comparable worth policies" (Santoro and McGuire, 1997: 507), and the environmental movement has often pushed

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[6] This group of stakeholders is not considered at the individual level, as our interest here is in *the population of prospective* employees who are outside the boundaries of the firm and thus constitute part of a firms' organizational field.

for regulation of polluting industries and for stricter environmental standards that used to be in the sphere of voluntary initiatives (Hoffman, 2001).

In sum, the expectations of social movements do not always correspond to those of other key stakeholders. But by mobilizing their resources and framing social initiatives as solutions to social ills, movements bring shared grievances to the surface and connect their ideas to critical stakeholders' values and interests (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004; Spicer and Fleming, 2007), leading these stakeholders to shift their expectations about what forms appropriate business conduct. A final example can elucidate the argument. In light of the high mortality rate from AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s and the attempts of western pharmaceutical companies' to ban the sale of (less expensive) generic drugs, a social movement emerged to argue for a more responsible corporate approach to the distribution of medication (Levy and Scully, 2007). The so-called Access Campaign was able to connect their project to the interests of a broad coalition of actors (including the Clinton administration, gay rights activists, and generic drugs manufacturers) by linking it with ideological concerns about fairness and public health, gaining concessions from the government, and subsequently the pharmaceutical industry (Levy and Scully, 2007). That is, movement ideas were brought to the public sphere (Crossley, 2003) and, with time, came to be shared and resonate with stakeholders. I call this the 'crafting of resonance' between the ideologies of social movements and the expectations of other firm stakeholders. It implies that movements play a part in leading other critical stakeholders to reward, directly or indirectly, firms' engagement in social initiatives, or to penalize those that appear incongruent with social expectations. To sum up, following social movement campaigns, the general public tends to grant legitimacy to corporate social initiatives, consumers value these

initiatives more, prospective employees are attracted to firms that invest in them, and regulators are more likely to dictate them.

Organizational-level mechanisms

The impact of social movements on individual organizations is perhaps the area that has received most attention in the field of strategy and organizations (e.g. Den Hond and de Bakker, 2007; Eesley and Lenox, 2006; King and Soule, 2007). A recurring question in this field has been why activist groups, often having few resources and little power to leverage, are able to inflict change upon the agendas of resource-rich and sometimes extremely powerful corporations (King, 2008). To address this question, much of the research in this area has focused on movements' attacks on firms that behave irresponsibly (e.g. Baron, 2001; Bartley and Child, 2011; King, 2008); yet, some insights can be used to understand how their actions may also induce corporate social initiatives.

Social movement constituents (e.g. formal movement organizations or less organized community activists) mobilize to stage aggressive campaigns that require changes in their targets' practices and threaten their ability to continue day-to-day operations. For instance, by resorting to public demonstrations, civil lawsuits, or other forms of direct action, activists delayed or even prevented the construction of many nuclear plants in Europe and North America. Indeed, for firms operating in the extractive sector, conflicts between firms and social movements can be quite intense, since corporations operating in these sectors often have significant impacts on the local community and natural environment (Kraemer, Whiteman and Banerjee, 2013). Examples of such intense conflicts abound, and range from information warfare campaigns between organized activists and firms (MacKay and Munro, 2012), to less formally

organized but sometimes extreme struggles against mega-mining projects by indigenous land-based communities who face the destruction of their livelihoods (Banerjee, 2000; Kraemer et al., 2013).

While these and other activist attacks can inflict direct material and economic damage to firms, on their own they are often not enough to lead firms to change their behavior. Ironically, the most likely mechanism by which social movements affect change in corporate behavior is a far more nuanced one: it is by shaping the reputation of their corporate targets (King, 2008). Activist attacks act as a signal that firms are monitored more and thus face a greater risk of disruption and public scrutiny. For instance, in 1991, following the dismissal of Cracker Barrel's gay and lesbian employees, the social movement organization NGLTF (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force) initiated a boycott on the chain. Although there was no evidence of a direct drop in the company's sales revenues, its share price fell significantly because shareholders were concerned about the company's reputation (King and Soule, 2007; Raeburn, 2004).

The ability to shape companies reputation is one of the most important weapons in activists' arsenal. Reputation matters to firms because it reflects outsiders "perceived ability of the firm to create value for stakeholders" (Rindova, Pollock and Hayward, 2006: 54). It shapes analysts as well as consumer evaluations and directly impacts the firm's bottom line. Social movement organizations usually target firms to punish corporate misconduct, but their actions might not only prevent such misconduct, but may also lead firms to engage in social initiatives. But what is the precise mechanism that leads firms to engage in social initiatives following conflicts with movements? Firms are cognizant of the role social initiatives play in maintaining a high reputation, and use them to offset the negative reactions that follow activist attacks.

Reputation management, the mechanism that arguably drives the link between oppositional activist attacks and corporate social initiatives can take two forms.

First, social initiatives can be adopted intentionally, to restore for example a company's reputation after activist attacks have ensued. These are reactive initiatives, by which the company tries to compensate for its dubious behavior and defend its public image by resorting to pro-social actions. For instance, large Canadian mining companies that operate in Latin America have engaged in voluntary initiatives such as infrastructure assistance, educational facilities, or community development programs (Sagebien et al., 2008). These strategies are not in response to demands of local activists, who usually demand them to 'get off their land', but they are meant to restore the reputation of these companies among local constituents and their chances of obtaining local permits or an informal 'license to operate'. In addition, back home, these corporations' tarnished image may lead them to adopt social initiatives in order to alleviate the negative effects that conflicts with activists pose for their reputation. Of course, corporate social initiatives can be adopted proactively as well, to avoid public scrutiny and alleviate the reputational damages of potential future attacks by activists.

The second way by which reputation management may link activist attacks to corporate social initiatives is more subtle and indirect. I call it 'unintentional' not because the initiatives are not decided by the company at the point in time they are adopted, but because they might result from its previous attempts to manage its reputation *without* resorting to social initiatives. For instance, firms targeted by boycotts are likely to resort to pro-social claims in order to defend their reputation and dilute negative media attention from the boycott (McDonnell and King, 2013). These actions could in some cases be mere ceremonial expressions that constitute impression management tactics (ibid). That is, firms may not make any substantive changes, but

simply change their discourse. However, companies that defensively enact impression management devices - such as formal structural changes (e.g. adoption of a CSR board committee) and increased disclosure (e.g. publication of a social responsibility report) - end up being more receptive to future activist challenges because of increased accountability (McDonnell, King and Soule, 2015). That is, in the longer term, even symbolic changes increase the risk that misleading claims will be identified, and companies may need to engage in actual social initiatives in order to satisfy activists and other stakeholders.

Organizational legitimacy is another attribute that activists can, at least to some extent, influence. Closely related to reputation (Bitektine, 2011), "organizational legitimacy" is defined as the "congruence between the social values associated with or implied by [the firm's] activities and the norms of acceptable behavior in the larger social system" (Dowling and Pfeffer, 1975:122). While above I spoke about how movements shape the legitimacy of a practice (i.e. social initiatives), here I focus on how they influence the legitimacy of a particular organization. Legitimacy grants corporations a social license to operate (Baba and Raufflet, 2014), and – per the above definition – relates to both the norms of acceptable behavior, but also to the congruence of these norms to firms activities as *perceived* by relevant audiences. The mobilization of social movement activists against firms and their theorization of certain practices as compatible or incompatible with social norms enable them to shape audiences *perceptions* and thus grant legitimacy to those corporations that satisfy their expectations. Thus, corporations have an incentive to engage in social initiatives in order to protect their legitimacy. For that reason, the relationship between activists and firms often goes from one extreme (conflict) to another (collaboration). Firms can come together with social movement organizations in order to change their corporate practices and collectively design social initiatives. For instance,

Starbucks' visibility makes it a target of contention, but at the same time the company has also worked extensively with NGOs to create social change (Argenti, 2004). While many worry that such collaborations may be seen as evidence of NGOs' co-optation, they are more and more frequent, as they enable firms to 'borrow' legitimacy from their non-profit partners.

As discussed above, legitimacy 'grants' firms an informal license to operate. But while the legitimacy of an organization is largely determined by its own actions, there are often legitimacy spillovers between partnering organizations (Dacin, Oliver and Roy, 2007). In the case of firms and NGOs, because the latter tend to be viewed as more consistent with the broader institutional logics that govern the delivery of social goods (Madsen and Rogers, 2015), partnering with them to 'deliver' on social initiatives enables firms to be viewed as more legitimate. Moreover, by having a close collaboration with NGOs, firms can sometimes forestall more aggressive interventions by stakeholders (Den Hond, de Bakker and Doh, 2012). Thus, insofar as they are perceived as sincere, such collaborative efforts safeguard firms against potential attacks by activists, further enhancing their legitimacy in the eyes of external stakeholders.

Overall, whether firms are motivated by the risk of damages to their reputation or by the potential to 'borrow legitimacy' from social movement organizations, the prevalence of activism is, *ceteris paribus*, likely to lead them to engage in more social initiatives.

Individual-level mechanisms

Contrary to early conceptions of rational action theory that assumed firm behavior to be driven only by profit maximization incentives, research has found that it is often influenced by

managers' values, ideologies, or cognition (Bansal and Roth, 2000; Briscoe *et al.*, 2014; Hambrick and Mason, 1984). This is important for the purpose of this essay because the ideologies that social movements promulgate manifest at the individual level as well, as they inform individuals' belief systems. In particular, as managers and other organizational members are drawn from the wider population, I expect the role of social movements in influencing public opinion to impact these individuals' ideologies. There is indeed evidence that social activism can shape public ideologies.[7] For instance, the shifts in public opinion concerning racial segregation were partly driven by the civil rights movement (Lee, 2002), and one of the greatest successes of the environmental movement is that it has rendered environmentalism a highly valued attribute (Rucht, 1999). As social movement theory would suggest, such ideological shifts manifest not only outside, but also inside corporations (Zald and Berger, 1978).

Inasmuch as organizational members are affected by the framing of social movements concerning the responsibility of business, and come to value socially-responsible behavior, their motivation to invest in corporate social initiatives might also be affected. This is because the ideologies that social movements 'carry' bring to the fore fundamental values. Closely connected to ideologies, personal values refer to principal beliefs about the guiding principles in one's own life, such as tradition, security, or hedonism (Schwartz, 1992). Each ideology is predicated on and incorporates a set of values that together fit the interests of a group (Van Dijk, 1998; Caprara et al. 2006). For example, feminism is an ideology that stresses the importance of the values of equality, autonomy, or independence (Van Dijk, 1998). Relatedly, when considering the more general 'liberalism-conservatism ideological spectrum', liberals are more likely to emphasize

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[7] Clearly, this relationship is not unidirectional. Certain types of ideologies will lead to certain types of activism, and activists will draw on pre-existing ideologies in their framing attempts (cf. Zald, 2000:9). My interest here, however, is on how movements 'shift' or 'use' ideologies.

values such as social justice or diversity, and conservatives are more likely to focus on individualism or respect for authority, among others (Briscoe et al., 2014). At the same time, the same values can be incorporated, and even appropriated by groups holding disparate ideologies. To borrow Van Dijk's astute example:

> "Managers ideologically 'incorporate' (pun intended) the value of freedom as freedom of the market or freedom from state intervention… journalists emphasiz[e] the freedom of the press, or the freedom of information… and dominated groups focus on … freedom from oppression" (Van Dijk, 1998:76)

That is, values support ideologies, and can be 'activated', at least to some extent, by different groups that aim to advance their goals or promote their positions.

Values, in turn, provide criteria for decision making and, when triggered, constitute important determinants of behavior (Liedtka, 1989; Argandoña, 2003). Consistently, evidence from prior research indicate that managers' ideologies and values are associated with ethical decision-making in firms, organizational response to environmental issues, and even corporate strategy decisions (Barnett and Karson, 1987; Bansal, 2003; Guth and Tagiuri, 1965). For example, Briscoe *et al.* (2014) used the ideologies of the CEOs of Fortune 500 firms as a reflection of their personal values and offered evidence that they are strongly linked to the likelihood of activism inside their corporations. Relatedly, in an earlier, inter-industry study of 53 companies from multiple countries, Bansal and Roth (2000) found that personal values influence firms' levels of ecological responsiveness in three ways:

> "First, […] values help decision makers to discriminate between those [signals] that are important and those that are not […] Second, environmental values will induce some organizational members to champion ecological responses […] Third, a firm's top management team and other powerful organizational members are more receptive to changes in the organizational agenda, products, and processes if these fit with their own personal values" (Bansal and Roth, 2000: 731)

In another notable study, Scully and Segal (2002) argue that employees import social beliefs into the workplace by invoking the discourse of a broader social movement and collectively mobilizing to sustain commitment to a cause and 'sell' issues to top management. All in all, by promulgating their ideologies to 'craft resonance' with other key stakeholders, social movements bring values to the fore and precipitate action inside organizations. The above studies offer complementary perspectives on how social movements' expectations are enacted inside firms. On the one hand, these studies provide evidence of top-down organizational change, with social initiatives being led by ideologically-driven senior executives. On the other hand, they indicate that organizational change that touches upon social issues can take a bottom-up approach, with employees acting as internal activists.

A second way by which social movements exert influence at the individual level is by shaping managerial cognition. As managers have constraints with regard to the issues they can consider, stakeholders compete for managerial *attention* and their salience might shape corporate policies (De Bakker and den Hond, 2008; Ocasio, 1997). Additionally, organizational responses to pressure are determined by managers' *urgency* and *feasibility assessments* (Julian, Ofori-Dankwa and Justis, 2008). Issues that receive more attention and issues that are perceived as urgent or manageable are more likely to lead to organizational action (Dutton and Duncan, 1987; Bansal, 2003).

The attention that managers assign to issues, as well as their feasibility and urgency assessments, are all likely to be influenced by social movement activity in a firm's institutional environment. First, as discussed earlier, the increase of campaigns defying irresponsible practices and praising social initiatives and the direct or indirect influence of social movement organizations through the media result in greater public awareness. This, in turn, brings the

ideologies advanced by activists to the attention of organizational decision-makers, encouraging managers to respond to movement pressures. By making opportunities to invest in corporate social initiatives more salient and communicating best practices, ideologically motivated social movements increase managers' awareness of such options; options that might have been either unknown or less prominent absent social movement activity. As the attention-based view of the firm would suggest (Ocasio, 1997), increased attention toward social initiatives should raise the likelihood that a firm will invest in such initiatives.

Through their influence on managerial attention, movements can also indirectly shape managers' perceptions of the urgency and feasibility of investing in social initiatives. Urgency is the perceived cost of non-response to an issue, which could mean either resolving a problem or capitalizing on an opportunity (Dutton and Duncan, 1987). Social movement organizations make ideologies that propose the need to change business practices more visible, as they attribute responsibility for a variety of social ills to the business community and threaten to damage firms' reputation and legitimacy. Both visibility and attributions of responsibility lead managers to assign a higher sense of urgency to an issue (Julian *et al.*, 2008; Dutton and Duncan, 1987), making it more likely that firms will act on those issues (Julian *et al.*, 2008; Bansal, 2003). For instance, if the environmental movement is more active in a firms' institutional field, managers of that firm are more likely to perceive environmental protection a more urgent matter, and consider engaging in environmental initiatives. Moreover, as the attention managers pay to social initiatives grows, so do their feasibility assessments: "the degree of optimism, positive valence, and confidence that decision makers have with regard to a particular set of circumstances" (Julian et al., 2008: 967) since exposure reduces the perceived uncertainty of adopting a practice

(Zajonc, 1968). This in turn increases the likelihood these managers' firms will engage in corporate social initiatives.

In sum, social movement agendas are reflected inside organizations. First, the ideologies that social movements promulgate are taken up by managers and employees who share resonant values, leading to bottom-up or top-down corporate initiatives reflecting movement ideologies. Second, movements' campaigns impact managerial cognition; the increased attention to social initiatives that activists breed and the corresponding changes in the perceived feasibility and urgency of social initiatives increase managers' propensity to undertake such action.

Integration

Abstracting reality in order to uncover mechanisms that are quite general is inherent in my approach, but I do not see the above three-level mechanisms as neat, orderly, and independent. Rather, each individual actor is embedded within an organization, and each organization is part of an organizational field, all of which interact with one another (Athanasopoulou and Selsky, 2012). Moreover, as social movements' ideologically motivated action transcends levels of analysis, a fuller understanding of how it leads firms to engage with social initiatives requires that the three levels are considered in tandem. The best way to illustrate this point is by example.

It was argued earlier that social movements 'craft resonance' between their ideological beliefs about the role of business and those of other stakeholders. But how does the support of these stakeholders translate to firm-level decisions? I identified four mechanisms related to this question, linked to four key external stakeholder groups: First, all practices – not only corporate

social initiatives – need legitimacy in order to diffuse in an organizational field, and support from the public is needed for CSR to achieve legitimacy. Second, with regard to consumers, organizations have obvious motivations to satisfy their demands, insofar as increased demand will bring value to shareholders. The more consumers value the products of socially responsible firms the more likely it is that firms will engage in such initiatives as they will expect a greater return on their investment. Third, concerning potential employees, if a firm faces a population of applicants that care about social issues it will be more likely to invest in social initiatives. By advertising its social or environmental initiatives or by taking advantage of its strategy's recognition in popular press (Bauer and Aiman-Smith, 1996; Gray, Kouhy, and Lavers, 1995), a firm can communicate its value system to potential applicants and attract more and better applicants. On the contrary, if the social behavior of the firm is perceived negatively by populations within its field, potential recruits will be less interested in joining the firm, which decreases the firm's access to human resources of high quality and may increase its recruiting costs (Maurer *et al.*, 2011). Fourth, the presence of a strong social movement in firms' organizational fields creates credible threat that they will influence policy and that business activities with social implications might be regulated. This provides incentives for forward looking-firms to engage in social initiatives in order to prevent stricter regulation (Banerjee, 2008; Lyon and Maxwell, 2003) or to gain a head start over competitors (Porter and van der Linde, 1996).

As the above discussion shows, social change cannot be understood *only* by looking at one level of analysis. Whereas the behavior that I seek to understand is at the organizational level (a firm's engagement with social initiatives is a firm-level outcome), the trigger, social movements' role in crafting resonance with other stakeholders, is at the field level. Moreover, it

is clear that although the mechanisms described above (those related to *diffusion*, *consumer support*, *prospective employees' attitudes*, and *(threat of) regulatory modification*) are at the field level, they could not be understood without considering firm-level goals.

A second example should shed additional light on the point I wish to make. As suggested above, social movements' pubic campaigns and framing attempts lead not only to external, but also to internal support, as organizational members' values come to resonate with movement ideologies. In addition, social movement campaigns shape the cognition of decision makers: their attention as well as their feasibility and urgency assessments. These lead to top-down (from senior management) or bottom-up (from rank-and-file employees) initiatives inside firms that create support for corporate social initiatives. In summary, organizational members' values and cognition cannot be understood without situating them in context; and conversely, individual cognition and expressions of values can have trickle-up effects that translate to organizational level outcomes.

Despite this inherent complexity, for the sake of greater specificity I broke down the investigation of mechanisms to the three abovementioned levels of analysis. Keeping in mind that systematically grappling with all the many complexities that this theoretical link entails can only be achieved through cumulative theoretical and empirical advances, this study has offered an important first step towards the development of a multi-level theory linking social movements with corporate social initiatives.

Discussion

By identifying the mechanisms by which social movements affect the adoption of corporate social initiatives (succinctly summarized in Figure 2), this essay contributes to current debates in the areas of social movements and CSR, advances understanding of how ideologies are manifested in movement-business interactions, and opens up several opportunities for future research. I discuss each in turn below.

Implications for the literature on social movements and CSR

It is a common premise that external stakeholders matter for firms' CSR strategies, as they attend to their social impact. But if stakeholder expectations are important to firms, how are these expectations formed, and why do managers come to know about some but not others? Similarly, do stakeholders *always* attend to firms' social impact? Prior work has fallen short of providing sufficient answers to these questions (Madsen and Rogers, 2015) by taking stakeholder ideas as given and assuming that they somehow, 'magically' or at least unproblematically, reach firms. I attenuate this conceptual disconnect by explicitly recognizing social movements as collective actors that both create and mediate expectations about the obligations of firms. While a full integration of the literatures on social movements and CSR may be unfeasible or even unwarranted, I hope that this paper will help researchers in each camp better understand how their counterparts view similar social dynamics.

Moreover, rooted in a long tradition of viewing social movement behavior as primarily disruptive (Weber and King, 2014), the focus of prior work on social movements has been depicted only as a direct relationship: "activists notice a particular social problem, target the offending firms, and, if successful, can coerce these firms to concede to their more socially responsible agenda" (McDonnell et al., 2015). But scholars' attention to contentiousness has

often come at the expense of other forms of claim-making (Zald, 2000), analyzing only one piece of the puzzle. The account developed here offers a more balanced perspective - one that does not suffer from 'a narrow focus on open confrontation' (Morrill, Zald and Rao, 2003) - and broadens the gamut of causal mechanisms that researchers can utilize to understand the impact of social movements on firms. Moreover, although the primary benefits of this study stem from the attempt to initiate an integrated understanding of the mechanisms by which social movements lead to corporate social initiatives, some of the individual components of my analysis appear to add value on their own. For example, this paper uncovers the possibility of 'unintentional' corporate social initiatives. When firms have no intention to adopt social initiatives and resort only to symbolic pro-social claims to manage their reputation, increased receptivity to future activist challenges (McDonnell et al., 2015) may later compel them to adopt actual social initiatives.

An indirect and perhaps tentative contribution of this study is to stakeholder theory. Depending on their ability to craft resonance between their beliefs and those of other key stakeholders, social movements may be able to alter the *a priori* ranking of stakeholders by managers, or elevate the status of a focal stakeholder within this 'ranking'. For instance, when social movements are better able to capture the attention of regulators, the threat of regulatory modification becomes more prominent, augmenting the importance of regulators. Similarly, when they are more successful in disseminating their ideas to the public, questions of legitimacy will lead managers to prioritize the public as a salient stakeholder. Overall, what this study suggests is that stakeholder salience (Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997) is not exogenous to social movement activity, but may very well depend on their collective action repertoires.

Social movement and managerial ideologies

What are the benefits of conceptualizing social movements as 'ideologically structured action' (Zald, 2000)? The answer to this question points to another contribution of this study, which concerns the recognition that beliefs about the role of business in society are not just mental or cognitive, but they are also social; they are shared by members of a group and often ideological in nature. In particular, ideologies are proffered by social movement organizations who use them to contribute to changes in social practice. Consider, for instance, that prior work has failed to offer convincing arguments about when personal values lead to actual behavior within firms. The identification of how social movements emphasize values that motivate top-down or bottom-up initiatives signifies that values are related to (or can even be manipulated by) activists' attempts to change managerial and employee behavior. By making the link between the ideologically infused campaigns of activists with personal values, I offer one account for when the well-known 'values-action gap' inside organizations might dissipate.

An added question that this paper sheds light on concerns the relation between the ideological views of social movements and those that dominate economic behavior and managerial discourse. In particular, when activists demand that firms resolve social problems, do we witness a collision of ideologies? As discussed above, social movement ideologies are inconsistent with the prevailing 'free-market ideology'. This ideology emphasizes the values of 'free enterprise' and 'freedom of the market', and is associated with neo-liberal political orientations linked to the so-called Chicago school of economics (Friedman, 2002; Miller, 1962). While the moral implications of this ideology are still debated (Cosans, 2009: 391), its most central legacy is a proliferation of the idea that the only responsibility of managers is the pursuit of profit, within the 'rules of the game' but without having to morally reflect on their actions (see

Ulrich, 2008:376 for a discussion) [8]. But this is inconsistent with social movement ideologies, which almost always include a moral component that implies broader expectations about the role of business in society. Thus, because activists care about different outcomes than managers, their relationships often manifest in an ideological clash (cf. Munro, 2014; Spicer and Böhm, 2007).

It is perhaps instructive at this point to offer a specific example where managerial and social movement ideologies collide. As suggested by Ghoshal (2005), the managerial ideology of free-markets that dominates western perceptions of the corporation does not recognize dilemmas inherent in the pursuit of divergent values and preferences in society; in particular it does not fully incorporate the trade-offs associated with the simultaneous pursuit of economic, social and environmental prosperity (Hahn, Figge, Pinkse and Preus, 2010). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of the environment and the recent debates about climate change. While there are many and disparate views within the environmental movement leading to different 'shades of green' (Hoffman, 2009), what the ideology of environmentalism always entails is the value of interconnectedness between human activity and nature; the view that "nature is not an inert entity to be used and dominated", "rather, nature is an intricate, interconnected web of which we form a small part of" (Garner, 1996: 340). Clearly, this ideology is in stark contrast with the idea that business has no social responsibility, as corporate activity has – even within regulatory

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[8] Most scholars associate this view with the work of Milton Friedman. My reading of his work does not resolve the persistent ambiguity as to the moral or ethical expectations required from managers. In his popular New York Times article, Friedman (1970) argued that managers have the responsibility to "make as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of society, both those embodied in law and those embodied in ethical custom"(1970: 33). In his book Capitalism and Freedom, Friedman describes the 'rules of the game' more narrowly, as "*open and free competition, without deception or fraud*" (2002: 133). He goes on to argue that "few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundation of our free society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible" (2002: 133) and that it is the responsibility of the rest of us to establish a framework of law such that each individuals' pursuit of self-interest will benefit society. Overall, what Friedman considers to be the 'rules of the game' is unclear, or at least debated (Cosans, 2009). Yet, the "most common reading of Friedman is that his analysis minimizes any moral duties beyond following the law" (Cosans, 2009: 391). This reading is congruent with the widespread idea that, at least within the bounds of the law, managers are somehow freed from "any sense of moral responsibility" (Ghoshal, 2005: 76).

constraints – frequently led to environmental degradation such as water and air pollution at the local level, and climate change at the global level (Hoffman, 2001).

This contrast is quite apparent in cases of direct activist attacks on corporations (Crossley, 2003; Eesley and Lexon, 2006; King and Soule, 2007). However, ideological differences are sometimes set aside so that activists can engender change, as illustrated by cases of firm-NGO collaborations. Finally, in cases of internal activism, organizational members may need to 'frame' their proposed social initiatives as good for the firms' bottom line (Scully and Segal, 2002). That is, they need to camouflage their intensions and completely mask their ideological views in order to achieve desired change. Overall, the collision of ideologies between firms and movements is not always observable and, even when firms are led to behave more responsibly, these deeply rooted ideological differences are unlikely to disappear.

Limitations and future research paths

Despite its contributions, the proposed account does not entail a complete theory; rather, it can serve as a guide towards a fuller understanding of the causal link between social movements and corporate social initiatives. In this context, it is important to note that a causal relation is perceived here as relying on underlying mechanisms that generate *tendencies*, not universally applicable laws. As such, two cautionary notes provide guidance for future research.

First, because theoretical mechanisms are not invariably triggered, it is important for future work to delineate under what conditions each of the mechanisms is likely to operate or gain prevalence over others. While activists can use this preliminary account to choose the specific ways in which they can ultimately impact firms, they will not always have the full set of

choices at their discretion. For instance, the choice between organized public campaigns and less formal action may depend on the openness of the institutions social movements face (Spicer and Böhm, 2007). Similarly, activists' capacity to influence company reputation may depend on their skillset in garnering media attention, and their potential to shape public discourse and craft resonance with other stakeholders may hinge on external factors such as freedom of the press.

Firm attributes can also be critical in shaping the potency of movement actions. For example, "corporate culture", defined as "the beliefs and values that are shared by members of an organization" (Martin, 1992; Van den Steen, 2010), can shape the efficacy of insider activism. Companies with a strong corporate culture are characterized by more communication and less monitoring (Van den Steen, 2010), and thus bottom-up corporate social initiatives by employees are more likely to be implemented by management. On the contrary, in firms where shared values are uncommon, bottom-up initiatives are less likely to be carried out. Another example is that of corporate mission. One can presume that firms whose mission emphasizes financial success will be less susceptible to social movement influence compared to those whose mission also stresses non-financial considerations such as employees, society, or the environment. And when it comes to the choice between different social initiatives, causes that social movements bring to the public debate are more likely to be implemented by a company if they fit with that *specific* company's mission (Cunningham, Cornwell and Coote, 2009). Other examples of attributes that could condition movements' propensity to trigger corporate social initiatives include corporate visibility, prior reputation, or firm litigiousness. More generally, future research needs to examine how movement, firm, and contextual attributes shape the efficacy of movement actions that fuel corporate social initiatives, giving rise to (or hindering) the mechanisms identified here.

A second cautionary note relates to the boundary conditions of the proposed theoretical account. For instance, empirical work should consider that while most social movements will lead to social initiatives because of the moral nature of their ideologies, it is very likely that there will be some exceptions. In particular, it is not evident how far-right movements (nationalist movements, or fascist movements) or revolutionary movements (e.g. Arab Spring) will relate to how firms behave with regard to social issues. The same could be told about anti-globalization movements (Sullivan, Spicer and Böhm, 2011; Juris, 2008), but only at first glance, as the recent wave of anti-corporate protest has been linked to civil justice claims (Munro, 2014; Spicer and Böhm, 2007) which may spur social initiatives related to the distribution of resources; and as I have argued, corporate social initiatives may not be promoted by social movements *per se*, but still be inadvertently caused by them. For example, I discussed earlier that indigenous movements that fight against large corporations in extractive sectors (e.g. Kramer et al., 2013; Sagebien et al., 2008) rarely do so in order to prompt social initiatives, but their struggles threaten corporate reputation, leading firms in turn to adopt such initiatives as a reputation management strategy. Finally, even among movements that do expect firms to engage with social issues, the type of movement will of course matter for the type of social initiative. If the environmental movement is more prevalent in a particular county or region, one would expect firms to engage more in environmental initiatives. And when there is a strong movement for social justice, corporations may be more likely to invest in initiatives that combat poverty and social exclusion. The decision of which movement to focus on and which social initiatives it may relate to can only be left to the empiricist, but acknowledging these nuances is critical for theoretical and empirical research to advance the theoretical account put forth in this essay.

Another boundary condition that I would like to draw attention to relates to the recognition that the proposed account is not deterministic (i.e. it does not suggest that social movement activity will *always* lead companies to adopt social initiatives); engaging in such initiatives is only *one* possible firm response to ideologically motivated activism. To gain further insights, scholars could examine when activist campaigns backfire, with firms responding to activists by engaging in symbolic behavior, such as for example greenwashing (Lyon and Montgomery, 2015) or creating astroturf groups (organizations funded by corporations but that 'masquerade' as grassroots groups (Walker, 2014)), and how activists in turn respond to such actions. Such questions are critical, and call for more dynamic models that incorporate reciprocal interactions between firms and social movements and that might enable us to understand the implications of the choice between corporate social initiatives and symbolic action for organizations and society. A more dynamic view of movement-firm interactions (e.g. McDonnel et al., 2015; Levy and Scully, 2007) is a natural next step for future research to undertake.

Finally, corporate social initiatives have a short history, situating this paper within a particular historical and political context. Within this context, capitalism is the dominant political system and most business activity – especially within capitalisms' neoliberal variant – is driven by a focus on the pursuit of profit (Friedman, 1970; Ghoshal, 2005). This context provides an important boundary condition for my analysis, and makes the mechanisms that were identified more likely to operate in the Western world where capitalism has stronger roots. Of course, this political system has faced strong criticism and even the notion of CSR itself has been under attack, with some critical scholars suggesting that it perpetuates a problematic worldview. I do not take a normative stance in this paper. This study does not examine under what conditions social initiatives can actually 'get the job done' (i.e. contribute to veritable improvements for the

targeted actors or society as a whole), or if they are 'part of the problem' (Fleming and Jones, 2012). Rather, acknowledging the current reality that business activity is dominated by an ideology that prioritizes economic concerns (Margolis and Walsh, 2003), I ask why firms engage with social issues, and how, in particular, social movements contribute to this decision.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this study was motivated by the observation that "scholarship in our field has pursued society's economic objectives much more than it has its social ones" (Walsh, Weber and Margolis, 2003; see also Pfeffer, 2016), but also by the desire to explain how social forces drive firms to engage in social initiatives. Viewing social movements as ideologically motivated, this essay suggests that they are able to induce firms to invest in such practices by forming the expectations of other critical stakeholders, shaping firms' reputation and legitimacy, and precipitating value-laden managerial action. Clearly, I do not suggest that social movements and the ideologies they proffer are the only force driving business transformation. However, my goal is not to be exhaustive; it is to shed light on one important antecedent of corporate social initiatives and to highlight the multilevel nature of the relationship between social movements and corporations.

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Figures

Figure 1. Co-occurrence of references to corporate social initiatives and social movements [a]

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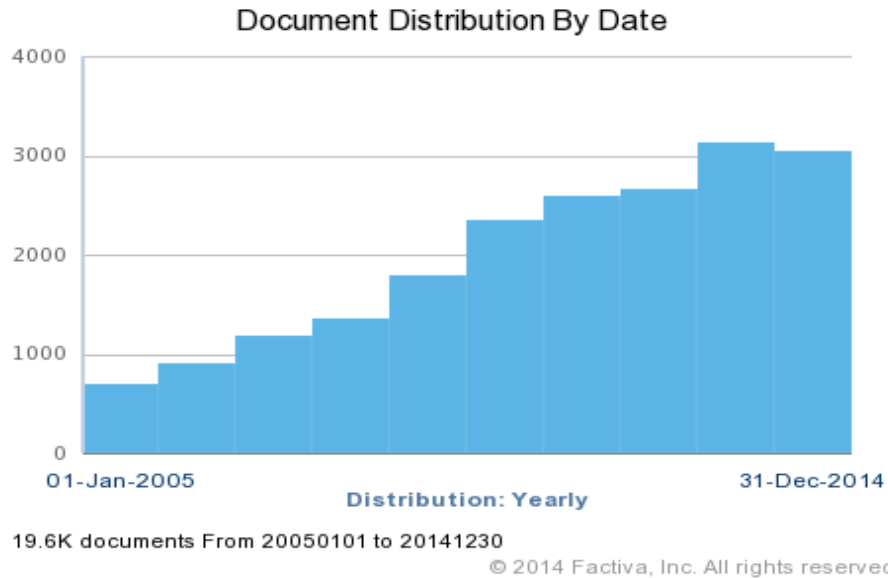
[a] The figure depicts the co-occurrence of terms that refer to corporate social initiatives with terms that refer to social movements or activism over the last ten years, based all sources available in the Factiva database. The search string that we utilized is as follows:

(social movement* or activis* or NGO* or non-profit organization*) and (corporate social initiative* or CSR or corporate social responsibility or corporate social action*)

Figure 2. The relationship between social movements and corporate social initiatives [a]
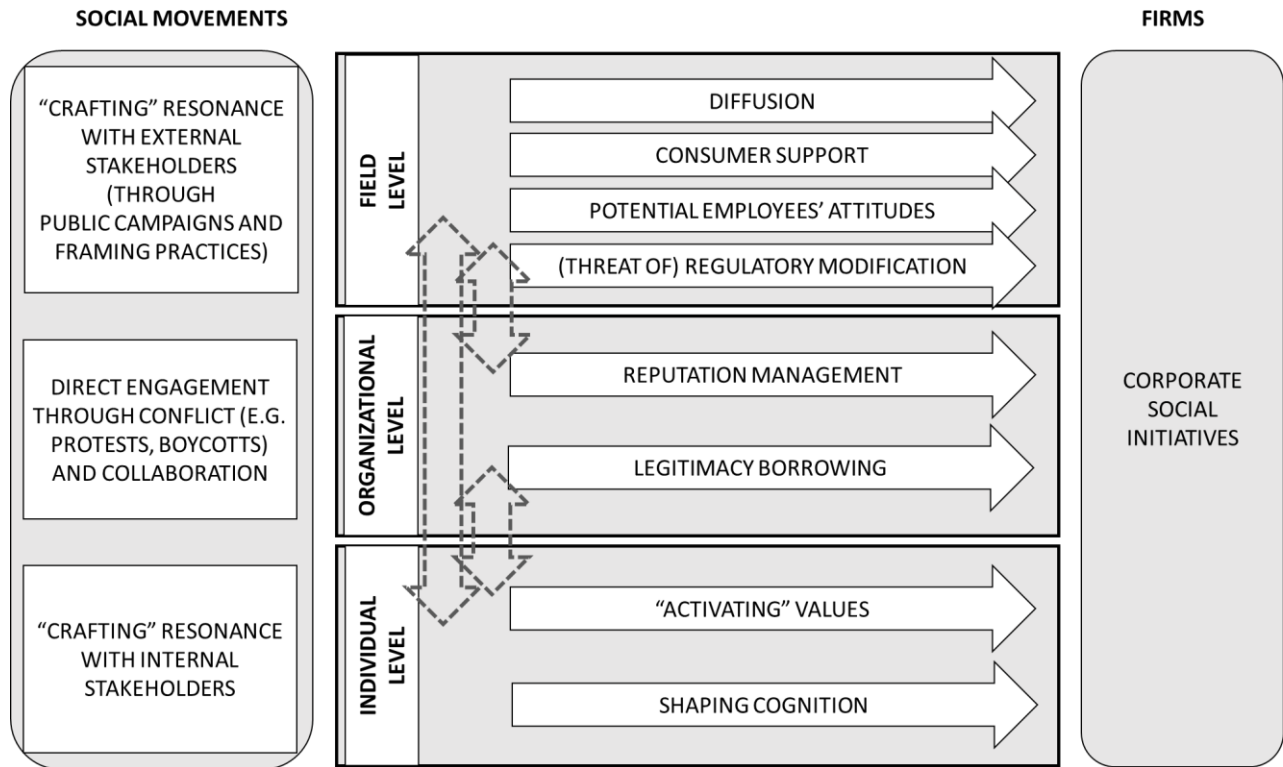
[a] The figure presents a parsimonious depiction of the relationship between social movements and corporate social initiatives. The boxes on the left indicate social movement actions, and the horizontal arrows in the middle include labels that indicate mechanisms operating at multiple levels of analysis: the *organizational field level*, the *organizational level*, and the *individual level*. The vertical arrows illustrate that these levels are not isolated, but that the mechanisms are characterized by cross-level interactions.
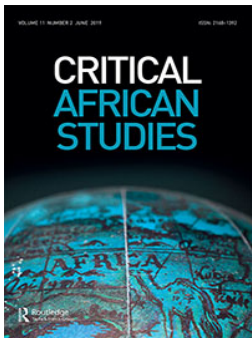
Civil society and social movements: conceptual insights and challenges in African contexts

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Civil society and social movements: conceptual insights and challenges in African contexts

Société civile et mouvements sociaux: aperçus et défis conceptuels dans des contextes africains

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The debate on different forms of political mobilization and self-organization in Africa refers to the established concepts of civil society and social movements. Knowing that the majority of studies on civil society and social movements focus on the Global North, we ask whether these concepts may be applied to Africa. We need to consider different forms of self-organization and the potential limits of the concepts. At the same time, 'unusual cases' from Africa may help us to sharpen our understanding of the concepts and to explore their analytical range and borders. This applies particularly to the observation that the terms civil society and social movement are often used interchangeably, which ignores the existing differences between the concepts. Therefore, we first consider their different perspectives: A study of civil society analyses the features of associations in a public sphere or arena and their role in politics and society. A study of social movements looks at processes of mobilization and action. Second, we point out the normative implications of the two concepts, especially with regard to liberal democracy, degree of politicization and relation to violence.

Keywords: social movements; protest; civil society; association; Global South; Africa; epistemology

Le débat sur différentes formes de mobilisation politique et d'auto-organisation en Afrique se réfère aux concepts établis de société civile et de mouvements sociaux. Sachant que la majorité des études sur la société civile et les mouvements sociaux se concentrent sur le Nord global, nous demandons si ces concepts peuvent s'appliquer à l'Afrique. Nous devons considérer différentes formes d'auto-organisation et les limites potentielles des concepts. Dans le même temps, des 'cas inhabituels' d'Afrique peuvent nous aider à raffiner la compréhension que nous avons des concepts et explorer leur fourchette analytique et leurs limites. Cela vaut en particulier pour l'observation que les termes de société civile et de mouvement social sont souvent employés de façon interchangeable, faisant fi des différentes qui existent entre les concepts. Par conséquent, nous commençons par étudier leurs différentes perspectives: Une étude de la société civile analyse les caractéristiques d'associations dans une sphère publique et leur rôle en politique et dans la société. Une étude des mouvements sociaux se penche sur les processus de mobilisation et d'action. En second lieu, nous montrons les

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implications normatives des deux concepts, en particulier en ce qui concerne la démocratie libérale, le degré de politisation et la relation avec la violence.

Mots-clés: mouvements sociaux; contestation; société civile; association; Sud Global; Afrique; épistémologie

1.   Introduction

Phenomena such as the Arab Spring, protests against the government in Zimbabwe or Togo, critical actions and protests in the field of housing in South Africa, or protests during elections in Kenya, have attracted interest in the international media and among scholars, particularly in political science and political sociology. In studies of these activities in African contexts, two conceptual terms occur prominently: 'social movement' and 'civil society'. The debate on social movements and civil society in Africa faces two challenges; first, the limitations of these concepts for understanding social phenomena in Africa, and, second, the unreflecting and interchangeable use of these concepts. The aim of this article is to provide new insights and deepen our understanding of how these concepts can be applied in an African context, and of the challenges this involves. This offers at the same time a new perspective on the concepts themselves.

If we look at current discussions of political protest, popular political debates or relations between society and state in Africa, we see that the concepts 'social movement' and 'civil society' seem to be taken for granted, despite some critical questions. We need to be aware that the majority of studies that use the concepts of civil society and social movement derive from the so-called Global North, especially North America and Europe. These concepts were developed against the backdrop of particular social and political conditions in Europe and North America, but they have also been applied to social realities in the so-called Global South. This transfer of the concepts to a different social context is a general shortcoming. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2012, 113) argue: 'Western enlightenment thought has, from the first, posited itself as the wellspring of universal learning.' Against this backdrop, the question arises whether these concepts are universal, and whether they can be applied to social realities in the so-called Global South, particularly to cases in Africa? Scholars increasingly question the hierarchies in knowledge production, referring to de-colonial debates which perceive such hierarchies as an outcome of colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018), and to the idea of travelling concepts and their limitations (Robinson and Parnell 2011). This reflection on Northern concepts goes along with a search for new epistemologies, the revival of indigenous knowledge (Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith 1999), and attempts to develop theories based on Southern cases (Connell 2007), sometimes discussed under the heading of 'global sociology' (Burawoy 2008).

Africa offers a chance to explore the ambivalence of social protest movements and civil society associations, and the challenges this presents for an analysis of these phenomena in Southern contexts. African civil associations and social movements, and their societal background, are much more diverse than in the Global North, which is usually the basis for the development of social science theories. If we want to develop concepts that apply globally, we also need to analyse cases that do not easily fit our idea of social movements and civil society associations. As we will see, the recent debates on civil society and social movements present a challenge with regard to Africa.[1] We suggest that the analysis of 'unusual cases', here drawn from Africa, will allow us to sharpen our concepts and to explore their analytical range and their borders.

This leads us to a problem that is also relevant with regard to the Global North. The terms civil society and social movement are often used for describing the same phenomenon. In a case of collective action, it is often hard to say at first sight whether it is the expression of a civil society association or network of associations, whether these associations are part of a movement, or whether the public protests were organized by a group of individuals. In addition, formal

associations refer to themselves as a social movement in order to highlight their dynamic character (see Daniel 2016, 121). Whether strategically or without reflection, the terms civil society and social movement are often used interchangeably. However, among scholars there are extensive conceptual debates with regard to the use of these two terms. Even if there is no agreement over their respective definitions, it is at least possible to identify a difference with regard to perspective. The concept of civil society refers to the features of associations in a public sphere or arena and their role in politics and society. The concept of social movement refers to processes of mobilization and action. In addition, the concepts differ in their normative implications with regard to liberal democratic norms, their degree of politicization and the way they deal with violence. Thus, the terms have several normative implications which influence our understanding of the respective phenomena. This is the reason why reflection is needed.

Three examples can serve to show what we mean. The protests by the Baganda community in Uganda were aimed at claiming autochthonous land rights and recognition of the Baganda monarchy as a regional government in the name of tradition (Kasfir 2016). In northern Ghana, there have been political and to some extent violent conflicts with regard to the succession of chiefs or the right of ethnic groups to install their own chief (Awedoba 2009). In Nigeria, public protest movements accused the government of not caring about the young girls and women kidnapped by Boko Haram; this led to a world-wide solidarity campaign ('Bring Back Our Girls'). By looking at regions beyond the Global North, this article will contribute to the debate on the chances and challenges we face when we transfer established concepts to the Global South.

For this purpose, we will start with a short history of the controversies over how to define civil society and social movements (sections 2 & 4). We will discuss the normative implications of these concepts, and their relation to the values of liberal democracy. After this, we will consider the extent to which actions are politicized,[2] and examine their relation to violence. We will then analyse the challenges involved in applying these concepts to the analysis of cases in Africa (sections 3 & 5). Our examples will illustrate what may be included under the concept and what not. The variety of cases we refer to highlight the diversity and complexity of civil society actors and social movements in African contexts. Finally, we sum up and discuss the application of the concepts to cases in Africa and the normative implications (section 6).

2.   Civil society: origin and applications

The basic idea of 'civil society' goes back to Friedrich Hegel and his concept of '*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*', first translated as 'bourgeois society', in the late 18th century. This referred to a new class of merchants, entrepreneurs and civil servants who claimed freedom from domination by the nobility and individual freedom from traditional bonds. The writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels followed this understanding. As a result of the success of Marx and Engels, the term 'bourgeois society' was linked to their theories. Because of this Marxist connotation in the Anglophone discussion, the original idea of Hegel was better expressed by the term 'civil society', as used by Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) (de Tocqueville 1948).

At the height of the civil society debate in the 1990s, a multitude of definitions were offered. Looking back on this discussion, there seem to be three interlinked concepts that describe civil society in different ways (Edwards 2009). One concept goes back to de Tocqueville (1948). According to this understanding, civil society reflects the idea that people organize their affairs by themselves. This includes social services, and of course self-organization and associational life. The rich debate on voluntary associations (e.g. Hudock 1999; Salamon 2004), and Putnam's (2000) influential study 'Bowling Alone', represent this line of thought. Other concepts define civil society as a societal arena. According to Antonio Gramsci, civil society is a space in which social conflicts are carried on with a preparedness to express political interests and to influence

politics. This makes civil society the main battlefield for fighting for a democratic, equal and social-ist society (Kebir 1991). This understanding paved the way for the concept of civil society as a public sphere. Habermas (1991) underlined the importance of a public sphere between the state, the market and the private sphere, for public discussions where citizens can deliberate in an open and peaceful manner on matters affecting the common good (Benhabib 1991). Jeffrey Alexander's 'civil sphere' builds upon this concept and expands it into a theory of society. Michael Edwards offers a third definition of civil society as 'the good society' (2009, 45–62). He refers to 'social con-tracts negotiated between government, business and citizens' (Edwards 2005).

A very recent definition in the 'International Encyclopedia of Civil Society' mainly combines the first two notions: 'Civil society refers to the arena of unconstrained collective action, arranged around shared interests, tasks and values' (Irish 2010, 166). Examples given in the Encyclopedia (Anheier, Toepler, and List 2010) refer to a wide range of associations, such as charities, non-gov-ernmental organizations, community-based groups, women's groups, faith-based groups, pro-fessional and business associations or trade unions, but also social movements. Even though no values are specified in this definition, there are implicit connotations. Like their forefathers – Edwards (2005, 2009) refers to Aristoteles and Hobbes – the large majority of authors link civil society directly with the ideals of political equality, peaceful coexistence, politeness, toler-ance, inclusion, trust, truthfulness, and willingness to participate in civic affairs and to support democratic principles. Gramsci's arena of political struggle includes different values. In his thought, civil society is the space where a socialist revolution can lead to a just and fair system. Thus, the concept of civil society is deeply linked to normative values and aims with reference to justice and equality. These normative connotations are most visible in the writings of liberal authors who connect civil society directly with democracy and liberal rights. The works of Edward Shils and Ralf Dahrendorf look at the societal pre-conditions for the existence of a civil society. Shils describes this precondition as 'civility'. Civility 'considers others as fellow-citizens of equal dignity in their rights and obligations' (Shils 1991, 12). In this under-standing, civility can be seen as a mode of political action that 'postulates that antagonists are also members of the same society' (Shils 1991, 14; see also Baumgarten, Gosewinkel, and Rucht 2011). According to Shils, this includes willingness to solve conflicts without violence. In a similar way, Dahrendorf (1992) coined the term 'civic sense' (*Bürgersinn*). These references to civility or civic sense underline that the existence of a space for the expression of interests and self-organization is not sufficient to guarantee a civil society. There is a need for a critical mass of people who commit themselves to the idea of civil society and observe the norms of civil society in their everyday life. Against this background, we must conclude that civil society is a special arena of self-organization linked to a normative concept of liberal freedom and democracy.

The discussion on civil society connects civil society with the expression of interests and pol-itical action (Gramsci), and with deliberation on political issues (Habermas). In line with Tocque-ville and Putnam, civil action is a way of expressing opinions regarding political issues, and everyday solidarity, in a vivid associational life. Civil society also includes classical 'political voices' and forms of self-organization and self-help that are not politicized, such as the above-mentioned registered charities, faith-based associations, or self-help groups. Quite a number of associations have a potential 'political voice', such as trade unions or business associations, but this option is not always used. With regard to violence, the normative aims expressed by the notion of 'civility' rule out the use of violence. Again, Gramsci is an exception. For him, socialism will be attained by political struggle for hegemony and through revolution (Kebir 1991, especially 187–217). Even if he does not refer to violence in his critique of the 'passive revolution', he implies that it is needed for a successful struggle (Gramsci 1971, 106–114). Even if this radical position finds only limited support today, the notion of civil disobedience is accepted as legitimate, even including mild forms of non-peaceful action. Despite the

ongoing debate on what is civil disobedience and what is uncivil violence, there is overall agreement that 'significant violence' must be condemned.

3.   Civil society in Africa and conceptual challenges

If we follow the debate on civil society in Africa, we might get the impression that these concepts describe the scene perfectly well. There are numerous publications dealing with this topic (e.g. Harbeson 1994; Hudock 1999; Orvis 2001). Even those who discuss the problems involved in applying this concept would agree that there is a civil society (Lewis 2002; Neubert 2015).

In general, we can identify a variety of civil society associations in African societies. We definitely find a range of typical associations corresponding to the idea of a liberal and democratic self-representation of the citizens. For instance, there are trade unions representing workers' interests, and not only in South Africa. However, in many African countries the political power of the trade unions is limited, and their activities are restricted to questions of labour rights, as in Kenya (Daniel 2016, 165).

In the African context, the term civil society is mostly used to refer to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Sometimes these are seen as 'the' civil society. However, most of them are not politicized, but are providers of social services, and therefore may be seen as a form of self-organization according to de Tocqueville's understanding. These NGOs usually fill gaps where the state is not sufficiently present. For example, women's NGOs in Kenya offer crucial services for victims of sexual violence (Daniel 2016). Human rights and women's NGOs have a more visible political profile. It is their activity that creates a link with the understanding of civil society as working for democracy and liberal freedom. These NGOs are important political opponents holding the government accountable for its action.

Some studies argue that in African contexts civil society cannot be clearly distinguished from the family and the economic or political spheres. For instance, there are civil society actors who take on state functions, or who are co-opted by the state, and thus cease to be critical opponents of the state (Kasfir 2004; Makumbe 1998).

This short overview shows that a focus on political protest and social movements cannot capture the variety of (potential) civil society associations (for a more detailed analysis, see Neubert 2015). Especially associations such as NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) cannot be understood as an expression of political unrest or protest; rather, they are carriers of social change or service providers. Together with more politically outspoken NGOs, such as human rights organizations, these associations are a dynamic part of African societies. This holds true even if we consider the critical debate on NGOs, their dependency on foreign donor money, and the influence of foreign donors on their activities (see Edwards and Hulme 1998; Neubert 1997a, 1997b). Despite international pressures on NGOs, they are part of society and their activities influence political and social change. The role of donors in civil society is not unique to African contexts, but in Africa the impact of donors is particularly strong.[3] However, those professionalized NGOs that simply implement projects on behalf of donors without a political or social agenda, and without a supporting constituency, act as mere enterprises or consulting firms, despite their possible success. They tend to follow the latest fashions in the development industry in order to get new assignments (Neubert 1997a, 1997b).

Another interesting feature of associations in Africa is ethnicity as the basis of group formation (Daniel and Neubert 2014). Today, in some countries, ethnicity is significant a means of political mobilization during elections, as the Kenyan case shows. Nevertheless, this kind of association no longer corresponds to civil society; rather, it is an element of party politics. A general observation with regard to associations in Africa is the great number of faith-based associations, either Christian or Muslim (Jones and Petersen 2011; Weiss 2002). They usually offer not only regular prayer meetings, but also facilities for education or healthcare; or they offer a space

for community development. Some of these professionalized facilities belong to the above-mentioned NGO sector; others are more or less restricted to the members of the religious community. Up to this point, most associations and the forms of protest voiced by these groups, correspond to the notion of civil society, even if the service sector is more important than acting as the backbone of democratic development. However, there are some particular features with regard to relation to donors, ethnicity or religion that are important for understanding civil society associations in African contexts.

The challenge to the established notion of civil society is a large group of associations whose norms and aims do not fit into the democratic agenda of the civil society concept: in all African countries, there are local authorities that exist beside the state (Bellagamba and Klute 2008). These are, for example, local chiefs, kings, committees of elders or sharia courts. In some cases, they are recognized in national law and represented in the constitution, for instance the recognition of chiefly structures in Ghana or South Africa, or of cultural leaders in Uganda (see Logan 2013). They gain their authority not only from formal state laws, but also from their own claims to 'traditional' legitimacy.[4] They are responsible for conflict regulation and land management, and they have ritual tasks, too. Lund (2006) describes them as 'twilight institutions'. Whether the chiefs have a formal position in the political system or not, they are accepted as the representatives and spokespersons of local groups. This position can be, and is, used for protests and demands at the national level (like the above-mentioned example of the Buganda). Whether such twilight institutions are part of civil society or not depends on their understanding of their own role. If associations that support political or juridical power for (neo-)traditional authorities accept their control under the system of checks and balances of a democracy, and basic democratic values such as freedom and equality, they may be subsumed under civil society. Even where the office of chief or king is hereditary, this position corresponds to the idea of constitutional monarchy as practised in the Global North. If a monarchist group should turn into a monarchist party, it would leave civil society and become a political organization. Certain civil society organizations in Brazil that turned into parties during the transition to democracy have been described by Stepan (1988). In some cases, these local authorities legitimize groups of young men who perform the task of maintaining local order. Especially in cases where the police are not able to guarantee public order, these local groups step into the space left open by the government. Groups such as urban vigilantes gain legitimacy by reference to traditional structures, or simply from their effectiveness and reliability. In some countries, there are even government regulations for vigilante groups (Baker 2006). Sometimes, such groups become a threat, as in the case of the Nigerian 'Bakassi Boys' (see Meagher 2007). In situations of civil war, or in so-called weak or failing states, we also witness a form of self-organization of young men as fighters or warriors, in the shape of 'local defence groups' (Neubert 2004) that claim to be defending the rights of their group. Striking examples of this are groups in the Eastern Congo, or the Nuer and Dinka in Sudan and South Sudan. They become what we call militias or violent actors, and may even detach themselves from their social bonds and act like warlords (see Neubert 2004, 2015).

All these examples are situated between state and family, and seem to share elements of civil society associations and thus challenge the concept. First, self-organization is based on shared interests, tasks, and values, with the objective of expressing (political) interests. These groups represent the idea of citizens who regulate their affairs autonomously. The actors take over state functions, as in the case of service delivery NGOs, or traditional rulers. However, in these cases the political and societal spheres are not separated, as is usually assumed in the civil society debate.

Secondly, even when local authorities have certain constitutional rights and functions, their legitimacy is gained by reference to tradition and not by an understanding of the social or political contract of a formal constitution.[5] African (neo-)traditional rulers are not committed to

democracy. Even if, in some ethnographies, local councils of elders are interpreted as democratic (e.g. Kenyatta 1938), they represent a different understanding of authority. They are at best a gerontocracy of old men who gain the position of an elder by age, respect and power, but not according to democratic principles or elections. They do not share the basic norms of liberal democracy (not even the norm of a socialist society as promoted by Gramsci) which are part and parcel of the understanding of civil society. Even when they are self-organized and represent local interests, they cannot be seen as part of civil society in its normative sense. Of course, authoritarian governments in Africa do not respect liberal democracy either, but they are not measured against the norms of civil society. This marks a difference between forms of self-organization that represent civil society norms – linked to the concept of civility and liberal democratic values – and forms of local self-organization based on tradition or simply on local power structures.

Thirdly, the reference to local defence groups (local warriors) and vigilantes raises the question of the use of violence. Military leaders such as warlords, or political movements that systematically resort to violence, are forms of self-organization that may be marked as 'uncivil society' or 'bad civil society' (Chambers and Kopstein 2001). Following Gramsci, the question would be what kind of political aim the groups pursue. Neither warlords, nor local defence groups, nor the vigilantes to be found in Africa, aim at establishing socialism. Even the left-wing liberation movements in Mozambique, Angola or Namibia have turned out to be nationalist liberation movements rather than socialist movements. Once in power, they are criticized because of their human rights violations (Melber 1990). The independent states under their control followed an authoritarian path, as many other African states did (Macamo and Neubert 2005).

Obviously, there are associations, forms of self-organization, and a public sphere that verify the existence of a vivid civil society in African countries. However, we have to admit that, while a large number of associations that are typical of civil society in the North exists, they are in general less politicized and often driven and financed by donors in the North; they are still struggling to build their own constituencies. Conceptually much more important is the fact that we find various forms of self-organization that cannot be covered by the large umbrella of civil society because their values and norms are not compatible with the notion of civil society, and/or they at least potentially use violence in pursuing their (political) aims.

4. Social movements: concept and application

Whereas the concept of civil society is deeply linked to that of liberal democracy, the concept of social movements emerged in the context of the French revolution, when the potential of mass behaviour became apparent. Borrowed from the Newtonian concept of movement and transferred to society, the term social movement was associated with progress. From 1844 onwards, the concept was used in socio-critical writings (Rammstedt 1978, 33 f., 53). The scholarly debate started in the early 19th century with Karl Marx and Gustave Le Bon. Marxism describes class struggles between the productive and non-productive classes as a result of structural tensions. Marx used these ideas to explain the exploitation of the working class and the need for revolution to establish a socialist regime. Le Bon's theory of mass psychology explains the emergence of movements as resulting from social decay, which is seen as a consequence of the erosion of social ties (Neidhardt and Rucht 1991, 422 ff.). While Marxism describes protest as a rational strategy, mass psychology sees the fears and emotions of activists as irrational.

From the 1970s onwards, the debates on movements in sociology and political sciences intensified. Therefore, the concept (re)emerged in the same historical period as the debate on civil society. These studies often showed an interest in, or sympathy for, the political aims of the social movements they described. Despite this sympathy, studies of social movements are less

loaded with normative assumptions and more interested in how social movements emerge, how they organize themselves, and how they impact political change.

Social movement theory has resulted in various approaches with different analytical focuses. The major approaches deal with Political Opportunity Structures (Kitschelt 1999), Resource Mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 2001), Collective Identity (Taylor and Whittier 1992) and Framing (Snow et al. 1986). They focus variously on the impact on protest movements of financial, human or symbolic resources (Resource Mobilization), the framing of discontent and protest demands (Framing), the development of belonging or a common purpose (Collective Identity), or the political environment in which movements operate (Political Opportunity Structures / political processes). The variety of approaches reflects the diversity of protest movements and the complexity of the phenomenon. Recent studies have combined these different approaches in order to develop a broader understanding of protest (Daniel 2016; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Corresponding to the variety of approaches, manifold definitions exist which highlight certain aspects of social movements. While some studies use the terms social movement and association equivalently, others investigate associations as the strategic core of social movements, responsible for identifying their goals and mobilizing adherents (McCarthy and Zald 2001). However, Della Porta and Diani (2006, 20 ff.) offer a refinement of earlier definitions. The term 'social movement' applies to activities involving:

- collective actors,
- conflicts with clearly identified opponents,
- dense informal networks,
- a distinctive collective identity.

In addition to the definition of structural features, Neidhardt and Rucht (2001, 540) consider a social movement as a 'Social entity of interlinked persons, groups and organisations […], who express protests via collective actions with the aim to change social or political conditions or to counteract ongoing processes of change.' Taking these definitions together, social movements can be seen as public protests and as 'collective action' which is based on a shared identity and which aims at social change. Thus, protest actions and politicization are the focus of social movement studies. This marks a difference to the civil society concept in a double sense. Without politicized collective action, there is no movement. Civil society associations react to problems of everyday life but they do not automatically qualify as a movement. The focus on protest has a second implication. Even when the particular society and political environment in which a movement acts are of importance, particularly with regard to resources, the focus is on the social movement itself. Civil society is defined as an area between the state, the market and the private sphere. Thus, civil society is a part of the society as a whole.

The study of a social movement usually includes a description of its political aims. For the question whether a collective action is a movement, the particular political aim and the values linked to it are not important. A racist movement aiming to establish an authoritarian fascist state qualifies as a movement in the same way as a democratic movement does. This is a fact that tends to be overlooked, because there are many more studies of movements for democracy, freedom, equal rights and emancipation than of anti-democratic or authoritarian racist movements. Thus, in contrast to the concept of civil society, the concept of social movement is not linked to any particular concept of society or social change. Quite a number of movements in history, and even today, are aimed at moving 'backwards' and understand change as restoring a former situation.

As in the civil society debate, the question of violence needs a deeper look. In general, violence can be an element of protest. Thus, we should consider two criteria. First, violent resistance

compromises boycotts, occupations or demonstrations. Sometimes there is just a thin line between violent resistance by a social movement and a violent conflict. One important point is the question whether all collective actors may be subsumed under the heading of a social movement. The idea that social movements are linked by dense informal networks and are based on mobilization excludes organized armies acting on central orders (whether national armies or rebel armies) as long as they have strict command and control structures. Guerrilla groups or some militias may be borderline cases as long as they follow a socio-political agenda, act as an informal network, and continually recruit new fighters. If they continually mobilize new adherents for their agenda, they act as a movement. Secondly, in a social movement violence is a means of attaining a political aim. A wide definition says that a political aim is constituted by actors fighting for a cause for the good of society as a whole (Rucht 2016). The burning of cars or the destruction of supermarkets may be violent expressions of protest. Violent collective actions aimed solely at plundering goods for personal consumption lack a political element. Riots aim at shocking and provoking the wider public by means of violence, while free riders (such as trouble makers or thieves) exploit the situation to their own advantage. Obviously, the line between legitimate political violence and other kinds of violence (Jobard and Greif 2016) is not easy to draw and depends on the legitimation of politicized aims.

5.   Social movements in Africa and conceptual challenges

The debate on social movements in Africa is mostly based on case studies describing particular protest activities (Ellis and van Kessel 2009; Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995). Recently, a few studies have discussed the application of existing concepts in Western theory to social movements in Africa (Daniel 2016; Engels and Müller 2015).

Interest in social movements in Africa starts with the analysis of colonialism. Lamer (2010) offers a periodization of protest. Thus, the earliest movements identified (in retrospect) are anti-colonial movements, such as the Maji Maji insurgency in the 1890s (Iliffe 1967) in German East Africa (Tanzania). This was followed by later anti-colonial movements like the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya in the 1940s, and the so-called liberation movements of the late colonial period in Mozambique or in Zimbabwe (Lonsdale 1990; Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995). At the time of the second wave of democratization in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, democracy movements emerged in many African countries south of the Sahara, following the protests against authoritarian regimes in Latin America and in socialist parts of Europe. To this day, democracy movements are important agents in the political processes of many African states. For instance, there have been protests against presidents who intend to extend their period of office by constitutional changes, such as in Burundi against a third term for President Nkurunziza (Human Rights Watch 2016), or in Burkina Faso (Frère and Englebert 2015) against undemocratic power changes. Another pattern is protests against election results and complaints of 'rigged' elections (as in Kenya in 2017). They might become violent, like the post-election protests in Kenya in 2007 (Lafargue 2009), or they may even cross the line and result in civil war, like the conflict in Ivory Coast. All these movements, from early anti-colonial to current pro-democratic movements, had goals such as liberation, freedom and democracy, and therefore share the overall normative orientation of civil society.

Another pattern is that of so-called bread riots and service delivery protests against deteriorating living conditions and rising food prices. They do not have an overall political agenda, but they draw attention to obvious social problems and inequalities and thus stand for the fundamental values of a civil society, such as in Burkina Faso or South Africa. These protests are an expression of civil society commitment (Engels 2013). In a similar way, quite a number of more recent social movements in Africa do not express a fundamental critique of the political system. They make

specific demands to be fulfilled within the existing political system, such as gender, human or labour rights, social services, or the remedying of social problems. Without aiming at a regime change, they may correspond to civil society values. In addition, in the past and in the present, many civil society associations have acted as 'cores' of social movements and are responsible for their agenda and their mobilization, such as the trade unions in colonial liberation struggles (e.g. Kenya, South Africa). These civil society associations have often been financially and ideologically supported by international donors. Thus, once again, the influence of the development nexus on collective actions becomes visible (Daniel 2016). Human rights or development associations, and churches, have supported, and sometimes led, democracy movements. As in other parts of the world, this is one reason why the concepts of civil society and social movements seem to be applied interchangeably. However, in studies of the role of civil society and social movements in processes of democratization, the topic and the research question are not the same. It makes a difference whether a study focuses on collective political action or on associational life and the implementation of democratic norms.

However, there are also forms of self-organization and protest that do not fit into the normative frame of civil society. Typical examples are religious or spiritually driven movements. Religious or spiritual norms and values relate to a particular context and go along with certain kinds of mobilization, group formation, claims and strategies. Religious or chiliastic movements are part of African history and they have been studied since early colonial times (for varying interpretations, see Ranger 1986). Even anti-colonial movements like Maji Maji had a strong element of ritual and a religious message. The Maji Maji fighters believed that they would become bullet-proof by the application of special magic water (*maji*). This pattern of political protest, and the belief in salvation and the power of magic also characterized the Ugandan Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena (Behrend 1993). In both cases, political aims and mobilization tactics are mixed with religiosity and magic, and a violent protest strategy. The latter holds true for current Islamic movements, such as Boko Haram or Ansar Dine in the Touareg region. These movements have in common that they fight violently for a vision of society that is opposed to the idea of liberal democracy. They claim that a better future and a better world can be attained by having the right faith. This also applies to some 'reform schools' in Islam, to Pentecostal and charismatic churches in Christianity, or to chiliastic movements based on 'traditional' African beliefs. In these cases, we have to ask whether the practice is collective action in the sense of the social movement concept. Are they movements or just social phenomena reflecting changing worldviews? In terms of theory, the main point is whether these religious groups want to change the life of their members, for then they can be described as a religious practice that attracts followers. If the group wants to change the society they are living in, as for example in the cases of Mau Mau, Ansar Dine or Boko Haram, then they are social movements in the theoretical sense discussed here.

This short overview shows that social movements are a form of social self-organization that may pursue the ideal of liberal democracy, but that there are also activists with different visions of a good society. They interpret individual freedom and collective freedom in a completely different way, or they pursue visions of an ordered society led by a strong leader representing religious, traditional or specific ideological values. In addition, social movements may, and often do, use violence as a means of protest. These movements cannot be considered as a part of civil society and require a more open definition that does not include a normative orientation or a claim to refrain from violence.

According to our definition, social movements include a variety of protests, such as violent post-election riots, liberation or separatist movements, rebels fighting for a socio-political cause, movements for traditional autochthonous rights or the reinstallation of traditional authorities (e.g. the Baganda Movement), and Islamic movements, including militant and terrorist

movements such as Al Shabab, Ansar Dine or Boko Haram (see for instance Marchal 2009; Wing 2013). Social movements are forms of self-organization directed towards political ends with differing value orientations, and they may use violence as a means of protest. But if we look at studies of social movements, not only in Africa but also in general, they seem to be biased in favour of protests seeking to defend liberal freedom, human rights and democracy (Ellis and van Kessel 2009; Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba 1995). It is striking that right-wing, anti-democratic, xenophobic, or racist movements are less represented as examples of social movements. A particular interest in specific borderline cases underlines this focus on liberal democratic orientations. These borderline cases are, for instance, violent protests (post-election protests, bread riots, service delivery protests) that turn into looting riots. Or, as the case of service delivery protests in Phomolong in South Africa shows, the demand for basic services may turn out to be xenophobic. In this case, the high unemployment rate increased the fear that services and jobs were going to foreigners. The protest turned into attacks against migrant workers who were seen as the main threat (Alexander 2010, 30 f.).

The former Ugandan Holy Spirit Movement shows the importance of the way in which violence is organized. As long as it was led by Alice Lakwena it had strong elements of a religious movement. When Joseph Kony reorganized the defeated Holy Spirit Movement under the new name of the Lord's Resistance Army, he developed clearer command and control structures and acted increasingly like a warlord (Allen and Vlassenroot 2010). Warlords and their 'armies' are outside the social movement category because of their control structure, lack of mobilization and lack of a socio-political agenda. From this perspective, a terrorist network organized in autonomous cells may qualify to be understood as a social movement, depending on size and societal embedment. The above-mentioned vigilantes usually lack a socio-political agenda, as in the case of the Bakassi Boys, and therefore cannot be seen as a social movement, even if parts of the local public welcome their activity as an instrument to restore public order.

Compared to the value-based concept of civil society, social movement is a much wider category. Quite a number of forms of collective action are social movements in the strict sense, or at least borderline cases, even when their value orientation or ideology, as well as their use of violence, contradict the expectations of researchers from the Global North. This detachment from a required normative orientation as part of the definition is a strength of the social movement concept. Moreover, with regard to liberal norms, politicization, or the degree of violence, it seems that social movements in Africa do not differ from those in other places. At best, the number of acts of legitimated violence are higher in the African context. For instance, in South Africa the burning of cars, the damaging of property and fights with the police are a daily routine in which the escalation of violence does not only result from activists' provocations (SERI 2017).[6]

Although the concept of social movement is wider, it shows some limitations, both in itself and in its application to the African context. For instance, Bayat (2013) introduces the notion of 'non-movements' to express that the fact that during the Arab Spring resistance was a part of people's everyday activities. Beyond the publicly visible protests, this form of daily resistance by ordinary people was an important factor in resistance against the regimes. Thus, Bayat draws our attention to forms of resistance that do not fit into the category of social movements; nevertheless, they emerge as a context-specific form of everyday life.

However, social movements are also an expression of the respective context. As the examples show, protests relate to a particular situation of discontentment and recognize cultural norms. Strategies and mobilization tactics reflect particular forms of self-organization, and use certain culturally related symbols, language or songs. The political and social context plays a role, not

only with regard to mobilization but also with regard to the claims and aims of the movement (Daniel 2016; Engels and Müller 2015).

6.   Re-thinking the debate on civil society and social movements from an African perspective

An obvious conclusion is that the terms civil society and social movement can be applied to Africa. We find both civil society associations and social movements there. But more interesting are those cases where these concepts do not apply or where the phenomena we find in Africa are borderline cases. We have to accept that the variety of forms of self-organization and protest is larger than we would expect based on experience of the Global North. Therefore, we need to develop our conceptual tools further to capture the social realities in a different context. This shows the challenges and the limits of applying concepts developed in the Global North to a different setting, and helps at the same time to understand the concepts themselves more clearly.

In a more practical sense, our findings underline that we should be careful not to overstretch the concepts when describing social realities. When studies of social movements and civil society focus on self-organization, they address the same phenomena from different perspectives. Despite overlaps, the concept of civil society does not include the perspective of social movements, and vice versa. The definitions of social movement and civil society given above describe the different concepts according to particular theories. They are helpful for marking the difference between various types of self-organized collective actors. In addition to these definitions, we have shown three criteria which can help to decide whether civil society or social movement is the more appropriate term to use in any particular case: orientation towards liberal democratic norms, the use of violence, and politicization of the collective actors. Against the background of our African cases, we need to see at least two important restrictions. First, the concept of civil society is normatively loaded and closely linked with notions of liberal democracy and individual rights. Second, it includes associations and actors that use limited forms of violence, such as civil disobedience, as a protest strategy. The use of extreme violence disqualifies any organization from being a part of civil society. With regard to social movements, the core definition applies to Africa. But more important is that the African cases show that we need to take the normative 'blindness' of the concept seriously. By doing so, we will be able to make an impartial analysis of movements that do not correspond to our usual normative preferences.

Imprecise use of these concepts tends to blur important distinctions. The African cases discussed here illustrate this problem. On the one hand, these cases from Africa show that the terms civil society and social movement cannot be used interchangeably, and on the other hand they enable us to understand why the respective concepts ignore certain social actors, or describe them insufficiently or with deficient implications. For instance, including neo-traditional authorities as part of civil society is to ignore the fact that their legitimization contradicts liberal democratic values. Their reference to their particular (ethnic) tradition is often linked with claims to ancestral land or claims to power that have a potential for ethnic micro-nationalism. Probably less obvious is the ambivalence of professionalized NGOs that act as consulting firms and implement development projects on behalf of donors. Despite their possible success, these NGOs do not represent civil society but are part of the development industry. We need to make the differences visible between neo-traditional authorities and NGO-consulting firms on the one hand, and civil society on the other hand; only then can we understand the multiplicity of particular societies. We should also be careful not to describe local violent actors in the garb of vigilantes as part of civil society. They may be a threat to other citizens and lack any orientation towards liberal democratic values. Social science concepts are only helpful when they enable

researchers to appreciate differences and exclude phenomena to which a concept does not apply. Catch-all terms hide important differences and thus are not useful for analysis.

The concept of social movement is easier to apply to our African cases than the concept of civil society. The strength of the social movement concept is that it is not normatively loaded and restricted to a certain notion of society. If we overcome the expectation that social movements fight for liberal democracy and human rights, we may regard movements such as Boko Haram, Ansa Dine or the Islamic State from a new perspective. With a neutral attitude to moral and political claims, we may be better able to understand how movements mobilize supporters, their strength and their ways of self-organization. Xenophobic violence, as in the case of South Africa, or movements fighting for 'traditional' rights, especially in respect of land, which are often led by neo-traditional authorities, may be analysed more clearly than would be the case if we tried to include them in the realm of civil society, or to dismiss them as mere micro-nationalism or vandalism. Thus, an impartial application of the social movement concept can widen our view of protest in Africa. At the same time, not every protest or collective violent action is a social movement. Well-organized independence fighters are not a movement but an army, even when they call themselves a movement. Fighting groups with a weak command and control structure that use violence as a means of enrichment are not social movements, because they lack any political or societal agenda, or ignore it even if they claim to have one. They are warlords or simple violence entrepreneurs. Finally, Bayat reminds us that individual resistance practices do not make a social movement.

Thus, clear definitions of the terms 'civil society' and 'social movement' can help us to analyse self-organization and protest in Africa. At the same time, we are able to identify phenomena that cannot be captured by the concepts of 'civil society' or 'social movement'. We can learn from the African cases, especially from the 'unusual ones', what elements make a civil society or a social movement.

There is one observation that applies to both civil society and social movements in Africa. This is the crucial role of religion and spirituality in processes of societal self-organization. There are many faith-based civil society associations. In contrast to Europe, belonging to a church or a religious group is an important part of the identity of the members, whether it can be considered as a civil society association or a religious movement. Another element of self-organization is ethnicity. The importance of religion and ethnicity illustrates the fact that civil society and social movements are an outcome of the particular social and cultural context. The reasons why these actors organize themselves are related to their social situation and their cultural norms and values. The ways in which they operate reflect the ways in which their society is structured. Although it cannot be argued that religion and ethnicity are important only in African contexts, their great significance there contrasts strongly with the situation in Europe. We also observe that the development nexus, or the degree to which it shapes civil society associations and even social movements (which are based on associations), is useful for describing specific African contexts.

In thinking about the differences between Northern theory and Southern cases, we see a need to enhance the 'travel' of concepts from the North to the South, and to develop our theories further against the backdrop of cases in Africa. This goes along with a learning process in the North which puts the reconsideration of theories from Southern perspectives to the front and encourages theory production in the South. Although in recent years scholars have become increasingly aware of the hierarchies in knowledge production, and different epistemologies, we still observe a need to reflect on these cases on a conceptual level, to analyse them precisely (also with regard to their normative implications), and to revisit them from Southern perspectives. We can also learn from the classics. Max Weber and Emil Durkheim referred to examples from different parts of the world in order to develop

their theories and make a typological order of societal phenomena. In other words, the classics highlight the importance of cross-regional comparison for developing and revising theories.

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Notes
1. We admit that large parts of Asia and Latin America would also be interesting for our purpose, but beyond the Global North we are most familiar with Africa.
2. According to a generalized view, every action is political. But in the context of this paper it makes a difference whether actors pursue clear political objectives, such as a regime change, the introduction or abolishment of specific laws, respect of human rights or gender equality, or whether they focus on common goods and welfare or providing disaster relief, without any reference to political structures.
3. This was one result of a comparative study of women's organizations in Brazil and Kenya (Daniel 2016).
4. The term 'traditional' may be misleading, because the role of local rulers changed during colonial times and after independence. But for this analysis it is not important whether the traditions are 'real' or 'imagined', as long as the authorities and their own followers accept the 'tradition' as legitimate.
5. This is different from the situation in the USA in the early nineteenth century described by de Tocqueville (de Tocqueville 1948), which might at first sight appear to resemble current arrangements in Africa.
6. However, the level of violence in protests also differs in European countries. For instance, protests in France have a high potential of violence, as the recent 'gilets jaunes' (yellow vests) movement shows.

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