

The Evolution of Social Movements

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Two ARC-funded PhD Scholarships

Applications are invited for two PhD scholarships available from July 2008, one for research on the institutional legacies of the Australian women's movement (tenable at the ANU) and one for research on the discursive legacy of the women's movement (tenable at University of NSW). Stipend \$26, 140 pa for three years. Funding for fieldwork also available.

CLOSING DATE 1 May 2008.

Applicants must have an Honours 1 or high 2A degree in an appropriate social science discipline such as politics, history or sociology and be Australian citizens or permanent residents or New Zealand citizens.

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The Evolution of Social Movements: Project description

Social movements such as the civil rights movement, the environment movement and the women's movement have changed the political landscape of Western democracies in recent decades. Social movement theorists have often assumed a limited life cycle for social movements, due to the difficulty of sustaining non-institutional forms of collective action. Women's movement historians, on the other hand, tend to see movements of long duration, with periods of peak mobilisation interspersed with periods of less visible activity. Today, following Verta Taylor, the latter are most often referred to as 'abeyance'—a period when a movement is in a holding pattern but is not 'over'. This project aims to provide data to test and build theories around social movement life cycles, shifting repertoires and sites of action, and the nature of institutional and cultural legacies.

It has four inter-connected aims:

- to map the trajectory of the women's movement in Australia 1970–2005;
- to map its institutional legacy;
- to assess its discursive impact; and
- to develop criteria whereby claims can be made that a social movement is either in abeyance or 'over'.

If social movements play a crucial role in bringing new issues onto the policy agenda and new actors into the policy process, we need to know more about the life-cycles of social movements and their effects on the Australian polity.

The project stems from previous research conducted by the CIs on the Australian women's movement and the changing forms it has assumed over recent decades. It takes this research forward with new conceptual and methodological tools, which are being developed internationally but are yet to be fully applied in Australia. The usefulness of the 'abeyance' approach, with its emphasis on the cultural and institutional dimensions of social movements,

became clear to Maddison during her doctoral research on young women in the women's movement (2006; 2007) and to Sawyer during the preparation of her history of the Women's Electoral Lobby (2007b).

Existing work in the field

The interest of social scientists in non-institutional politics and social mobilisation increased after the rise of new forms of political action in the 1960s, when students and other middle-class radicals took to the streets. There was an upsurge in theorising about how and why such new collective actors were appearing on the scene, leading to two major bodies of social movement literature. One stems primarily from Europe and focuses on the production of new collective meanings and identities (Melucci 1989). The other stems primarily from North America and focuses on resource mobilisation by new collective actors and the opportunity structures that enabled this to take place (Tarrow 1994).

In recent years social movement theorists have combined these approaches with varying degrees of success, emphasising the discursive strategies of social movements, the ways in which they generate new frames for interpreting the world but also the ways in which they connect to existing frames (eg Meyer et al 2002). Successful discursive strategies (and they are not always successful) introduce persuasive new ways of viewing the world and place new issues onto the policy agenda.

In the Australian context, Ian Marsh (2005) has argued that in recent decades all new issues have reached the policy agenda via new social movements. Following early work by Jan Pakulski (1991), Verity Burgmann (1993; 2003) has produced ground-breaking works mapping the emergence of new social movements in Australia and their role relative to that of other actors in generating social change. She covers the Aboriginal rights movement, the environment movement, the women's movement and, more recently, the anti-globalisation movement. Other important accounts that focus on the women's movement include those by Gisela Kaplan (1996) and Chilla Bulbeck (1997). These focus on the women's movement's intersection or lack of intersection with other movements, and its failure to adequately encompass Indigenous, migrant or working-class women. Marilyn Lake (1999) reaches further back to examine women's framing of policy claims over more than 100 years.

Another important strand of social movement theorising has focused on the repertoires of contestation used by social movements, how these change with the architecture of politics and how they are disseminated globally (Tilly 2004). North American scholars have often viewed the use of unconventional and disruptive repertoires of political action as a defining element of social movements, or at least as a heuristic device to distinguish them from other collective actors. Social movement theorists have recently challenged the idea that social movements are by definition involved in disruptive repertoires (McAdam et al 2005), particularly in relation to the women's movement (Staggenborg & Taylor 2005). The women's movement is seen by some as operating most characteristically at the level of everyday life and relationships, rather than through participation in collective protest (Mansbridge, forthcoming).

While women's movements may not be involved in disruptive collective action all the time, they have relied on the mass media to get their message out to broader audiences. Women's movements have created 'dissent events' of the kind described by Scalmer (2002) as occurring in Australia. In the United States, Anne Costain (1992) used the *New York Times Index* to

map the rise and fall of the women's movement in terms of the reporting of such movement events, while in the United Kingdom Paul Bagguley (2002) used *The Times*. Women's movements, however, have generally combined such street repertoires with other less visible forms of challenge and media reports may not accurately reflect social or policy influence.

As early as 1976 Women's Electoral Lobby activists in Australia were complaining that just because they were no longer in the streets with placards, the media assumed the women's movement was over (Sawer 2007b). In fact the policy influence of the new women's movement was just beginning in many jurisdictions. In West Germany the women's movement has been found to have the lowest proportion of protest events of five movements, despite the existence of large numbers of women's groups, and has been found to focus on interaction in settings other than the streets and the media (Rucht 2003).

The trajectories of social movements

The social movement literature contains many hypotheses concerning the trajectories of social movements. The first is that there is a naturally short life span for intense social movement activism and engagement. This hypothesis received an influential form in Sidney Tarrow's (1994) life-cycle model of social movements. Social movements become possible within certain historical conjunctures, and by their nature as non-institutionalised forms of collective action cannot be sustained for very long. Their life cycles are limited by internal factors, which may relate to the volatility of emotions that drive non-institutionalised protest, such as rage at injustice (Goodwin et al 2001); and external factors, which can include the change to a less favourable political and social context where movement activism no longer has discernible returns.

The second hypothesis is that social movements that succeed in achieving their aims change into something else—for example, through opening up new opportunities in the power structure or in professional careers for those they have mobilised. Movement from the streets into the corridors of power may be regarded 'the long march through the institutions' on the one hand or co-option on the other. The transformation of social movements into 'something else' may also create a new constellation of institutions reflecting movement values and perspectives—for example the institutionalising of women's movement values in women's services such as domestic violence refuges (Bagguley 2002) or the unobtrusive mobilisation of women within mainstream institutions and vocational bodies (Katzenstein 1990). The 'submerged networks' created by social movements may sustain cultural change within communities and within daily life.

The third hypothesis is that cognitive frames shift so markedly in a post-modern era that collective action to achieve social goals no longer appears a real option, as collective identities become fragmented and social movement mobilisation is delegitimised. New cognitive frames that stress individual market choices and cultural consumption become dominant, overshadowing the values of collective action (Sawer 2006). The ability to 'speak for' shared identities and values is called into question as the fragmented and contingent nature of identity makes the assumption of shared values problematic. This loss of faith in collective identities removes the political base for claims-making and enables the dismantling of social movement policy gains and policy structures.

The fourth hypothesis is that the emotion cultures of social movements may sustain groups after broader mobilisation recedes—in other words, social movement organisations may be sustained by close friendships based on shared values (Taylor 1989). Within abeyance structures the meanings and identities produced by social movements may be preserved through periods when the political environment is unreceptive, and provide continuity from one stage of mobilisation to another (Rupp and Taylor 1987). This hypothesis leads to another—that activism during the downturn is the foundation for later success (Maddison and Scalmer 2006). In other words, there will be a third wave of women's movement mobilisation and it will have some identifiable continuity with earlier waves.

The women's movement and concepts of abeyance

The media assumption that the women's movement was 'over', which became common in the 1980s, relied on a definition of a social movement tied to particular repertoires of action. However, as we have seen, these may not be characteristic of women's movements. The idea that a social movement might be 'over' when it was no longer visibly engaged in public contestation did not coincide with feminist views that there had always been a women's movement over the past century (Spender 1983; Lake 1999). In response to such dilemmas of how to define social movements and whether social movements could still be said to exist when they became relatively unobtrusive, social theorists began to develop the concept of social movement abeyance (Taylor 1989).

As already noted, the term 'abeyance' refers to a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in non-receptive political environments. The women's movement might no longer be visible on the streets but still be working its way through institutions, and be alive within submerged networks, cultural production and everyday living (Whittier 1995; Maddison 2004). Apart from these expressive manifestations of feminist identity, women's movements may also look upwards and outwards, finding new homes in the multilateral institutions that have promoted gender mainstreaming and electoral quotas and in cyberspace. It is claimed that feminist activism within cyberspace has become 'a new form of consciousness-raising and one that has taken on a global perspective' (Marshall 2008).

Meanwhile women's organisations may become more specialised and professionalised, and more reliant on cheque-book membership than collective action. They may turn away from direct policy engagement and public contestation, when this has few returns, and focus more on commemorative activities that validate collective identities and values (Sawer 2007b). This turning away from policy engagement has been associated in the US with increased polarisation between movement organisations 'co-opted by the state' and radical groups that focus on cultural expression and abeyance activities insulated from mainstream politics. Sawyers & Meyer (1999), for example, identify policy costs resulting from depoliticisation and suggest that successful mobilisations could have taken place if different strategic choices had been made.

While the decline in policy contestation in Australia reflects more a decline in active membership than increased polarisation between women's movement organisations, the policy costs of a decline in visible protest appear similar. A major issue is whether a movement that no longer has a visible media presence can provide a political base for women's policy machinery and for the protection of women's policy gains. Australia has been noted for early institutionalisation of the policy insights of second-wave feminism within government (Sawer 1990; Eisenstein 1996; Weldon 2002; Chappell 2002). Australian

experience suggests that the precarious institutionalising of feminist perspectives within the state cannot survive the loss of visible movement activity outside (Chappell 2006; Sawer 2007a; Maddison & Partridge 2007). Changes within movements relate not only to changing political environments and life-cycle influences but also to generational shifts. Feminist activity and identity may take different forms among young women, sometimes with little connection to older women activists (Maddison 2006; 2007).

The present project will explore the concept of social movement abeyance with reference to the experience of the Australian women's movement. An event database will be constructed to track the changing repertoires and visibility of the movement. This database will be related to longitudinal data on women's policy structures within government and associated women's services. It will also be used to analyse discursive legacies and propositions concerning shifts from political to cultural arenas. The evidence generated by these strands (events, institutions, discourse) will be used to test existing propositions concerning lifecycles and repertoires of movements. It will also seek to develop criteria, usable for single-country and comparative work, to assess whether social movements are flourishing, in abeyance, or 'over'.

SIGNIFICANCE AND INNOVATION

Significance

Social movements have played a central role in the shaping of popular consciousness, contemporary identity and the public policy agenda in Australia. This project will tell us more about the dynamics of social movements and their sustainability. At a time when there is widespread disengagement with formal political institutions on the part of young people there is a pressing need to know more about the movements that in recent decades have brought many people into engagement with the political life of the nation. The project will provide the first systematic evidence of the changes within one movement and the effects of these changes in terms of political participation, policy engagement and public life.

Innovation

This project undertakes ground-breaking work in relation to understanding social movement lifecycles. It is the first project to test the concept of social movement abeyance in relation to Australia. It is also the first to use event data to track the trajectory of an Australian movement over a substantial period of time and the first to map institutional and discursive change against such event data. It will provide a firmer empirical base than previously available for analysing the shifting repertoires and salience of the Australian women's movement. In addition to testing the abeyance concept in a new country, it will advance Australian scholarship by bringing new frameworks and methods to the study of women's political history.

The project will be distinctively interdisciplinary, introducing methods into Australian political science that have been developed internationally by historical sociologists. Moreover it will be the first major Australian contribution to the new international literature on social movement abeyance. In particular, it uses Australian evidence to explore whether institutionalisation *per se* should be regarded as an abeyance phenomenon or, rather, a strategy engaged in where the opportunity structure permits. It will challenge existing propositions concerning the place of institutionalisation in social movement lifecycles.

The project will also help advance international scholarship through its innovative theory-building component—through the development of criteria for determining whether a social movement is in abeyance or is actually over. Movements declared over because they are no longer engaging in certain repertoires may be engaging in other repertoires with recognisable social movement continuity. This aspect of the project will be a significant contribution towards making social movement theory more encompassing of women's movement experience.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The project will build on current social movement theory, as outlined in E2, and on the operationalising of this theory in previous work of the two CIs. The project has four main components: (1) mapping the trajectory of the women's movement in Australia 1970–2005 in terms of events; (2) mapping the institutional legacy of this wave of mobilisation; (3) mapping the discursive legacy of the women's movement; and (4) contributing to social movement theory by developing criteria whereby a movement may be said to be 'over' or, alternatively, in abeyance.

One hypothesis is that feminist institutionalisation within, for example, government bureaucracy or women's services, has been one strand of social movement activity rather than an abeyance feature. A related hypothesis is that the existence of such machinery and services is threatened by the loss of visible protest events outside. The project will use the Australian women's movement as a focus to test propositions that social movement identities are increasingly being expressed or maintained through new spaces such as the internet.

Mapping the trajectory

The first component includes the major task of developing an event data-base for the women's movement over 35 years. Event research has been a staple of social movement research in the USA and has been conducted in Australia by Sean Scalmer (2002) for the period 1965–71. The proposed coding frame will include actor(s), numbers, type of action, space of action, date, demand, and object of demand. Reliability of coding will be tested at the start of the project. The Women's Electoral Lobby history media database with its 3000 items will also need recoding for purposes of this project.

The event database will use the *Sydney Morning Herald* as a starting point to identify events to be coded, despite the problems identified by Scalmer and others in using mainstream media to map social movement events. The reason for including a newspaper as a proxy for mainstream media coverage is the hypothesis that media visibility is a crucial ingredient in social movement policy influence. From 1985 Lexis-Nexis and/or Factiva will also be used. While this is not a media study, media coverage is one important indicator of political salience.

The event data base will also use movement publications to ensure more comprehensive mapping. These will include *Me Jane*, *WEL-Informed*, radical newspapers such as *Tribune* and *Green Left Weekly* and calendars of women's events produced by women's information services. These will be supplemented by case studies of annual events such as International

Women's Day (IWD) and Reclaim the Night, and the changing nature of participation and repertoires. For example, it will explore the trajectory of IWD from concerts and luncheons to large-scale protest marches back to breakfasts, lunches and celebratory events. The IWD case study will draw for the earlier period on Stevens (1985) and the three Union of Australian Women histories and for the later period on the IWD events website established in 1996 (<http://www.isis.aust.com/iwd/events>).

(2) Mapping the institutional legacy

The second component, mapping and assessing the institutional legacy, will be operationalised through a longitudinal case study of women's policy machinery and associated information services. It will build on surveys conducted by Sawyer in 1989 (federal and state policy units); 1998 (federal and intergovernmental); and more recently of federal units only (Sawyer 1990; 1994; 2003; 2007a). It will also draw on longitudinal surveys such as that on domestic violence policy being conducted by Suellen Murray at RMIT. It will involve new surveys at federal, state and territory levels, at inter-governmental levels (including ministerial councils and officials meetings) and regional levels (APEC). The intergovernmental survey will be conducted in conjunction with a Commonwealth/State officials meeting, as with the 1998 Sawyer survey.

This survey will plot the location (access) and resources of Australian women's policy machinery over time, as well as policy transfer mediated by intergovernmental bodies. It will also draw on the UN Division for the Advancement of Women directories of national women's machineries and related expert group meetings for a comparative dimension. It will begin from the hypothesis that institutionalisation within government does not survive the loss of visible social movement activity outside, even where political opportunity structures remain otherwise relatively favourable.

(3) Assessing the discursive legacy

The third component, assessing the discursive legacy, will be operationalised through a snapshot analysis of the presence and content of feminist discourse on the internet, scanning Australian-based feminist websites, blogs and e-lists. This will include seeking information from website and list-owners concerning server statistics and traffic. Although important scholarship exists on the limitations of the internet in producing community (Calhoun 1998), the internet has been chosen for the case study in response to views that the web might be the source of the 3rd WWWave (Garrison 2000) or new feminist communities (Wajcman 2004). Australian studies have shown how social movements other than the women's movement are operating through the internet (eg Edwards 2005). We have chosen the internet as a site for exploring discursive impact in part because of the way the internet has been conceived as an alternative space for 'new' young women's feminism (Harris 1998; 2003), as well as because the internet provides new resources for existing social movement organisations.

The study will begin by identifying appropriate cues for inclusion under the rubric of 'feminist discourse' even where feminism itself is not the obvious marker, as with the e-list linking national women's organisations. The findings of the internet case study will be analysed with a view to tracing changes in feminist discourse, specifically between generations of women (Maddison 2004). The findings will be tested against existing literature that explores expressions of feminist discourse in popular culture (eg Hollows & Mosely 2006), where concerns about the vulnerability of this legacy to market forces and the commodification of discourse are expressly addressed.

(4) Contributing to social movement theory

The fourth component, the development of criteria whereby a social movement might be judged to be in abeyance or actually over, will build on the varying conceptualisations of abeyance in international social movement theory. It will draw on the empirical event data and discursive and institutional evidence produced by the project to move abeyance theorising forward and ensure its applicability to countries where the women's movement has taken a more institutionalised form.

| 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Recruit scholars, institutional internet surveys | PhD design and survey reports | Prepare and first publish survey reports | Prepare and second publish survey reports | Completion of PhD theses; preparation of women's related history month publications |
| Recruit research finalise frame initiate database | pt staff; coding and event | Work-in-progress seminars and conference papers | Planning of capstone book | Completion and publication of event database; papers to Women's Worlds Congress |
| Literature and development of website | survey Refereed papers to IPSA Congress, Chile | Preparation of journal articles (eg for <i>Social Movement Studies</i>) | Revision of journal articles; writing of capstone volume | Submission of book manuscript |

NATIONAL BENEFIT

This study of the life cycle of social movements will enhance our understanding of political change. Social movements have been a major source of political change in Australia and our region and we need to know more about the direction such change is likely to take. While it is known that social movements serve as a catalyst for citizen engagement and for new policy agendas, not enough is known about the life cycles of social movements themselves. This project will increase our knowledge of how people engage in non-institutional politics and how such engagement can be sustained over time. In particular, it will enhance our understanding of how social movement abeyance impacts on political life and political engagement. The widespread disenchantment with institutional politics among young people makes this project particularly pressing.

In scholarly terms, the project will develop and apply methodologies that can be used in other projects in Australia and will help train a new generation of social movement scholars. Both the methodological approach and the new data it generates will help lift the profile of Australian social movement research internationally and facilitate the participation of Australian scholars in large-scale comparative research.

COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

Initial findings will be presented in papers to conferences such as the Australasian Political Studies Association conference and subsequently to the 2009 International Political Science Association Congress in Chile and the 2011 Women's Worlds Congress (the major international forum for research on feminist social movements). The CIs will co-author refereed articles in leading international journals such as *Social Movement Studies* and *Mobilization*. This will enable the theoretical implications of the research findings to be shared with an international audience. It is hoped a blog can be created to further engage with international scholars on comparative trajectories of social movements and criteria for determining abeyance or disappearance.

As with other recent projects led by Sawer, such as the history of Women's Electoral Lobby, reports on the different strands of the project will be progressively posted on the project website. These will be made available for purposes such as school and university curriculum and citizenship education. The events database will be brought to the notice of a broader Australian public through forums such as Women's History Month and participating libraries and archives. The capstone book, *Changing Australia*, will analyse the changing forms taken by social movements over time as well as the differing ways in which they contribute to social change. The institutional legacy of the women's movement will be assessed, along with its contribution to the changed expectations and consciousness of new generations.

ROLE OF PERSONNEL

The two CIs bring complementary skills and experience to the project. Together they have unequalled access to different generations of activists and advocates. They have already worked successfully as a team in the production of the major Democratic Audit Report on women and Australian democracy. Marian Sawer (CI) will draw on her experience in leading large projects and her research on women's movement institutionalisation and repertoires. She will co-ordinate the different components of the project and oversee the preparation of

publications. She will take primary responsibility for the event database and the institutional legacy components. Sarah Maddison (CI) will contribute her methodological skills and experience with social movement research, particularly relating to young activists and issues of conflict and identity. She will take primary responsibility for overseeing the discursive legacy and internet component of the project. The CIs will take joint responsibility for developing the theoretical framework of the study and preparation of the capstone book. Other publications will be jointly written with the PhD scholars and with each other.

The part-time research officer will prepare the event database for the Australian women's movement 1970–2000, including the scanning of one major newspaper for a 30-year period; the scanning of supplementary publications; the coding of all items; and the recoding of items from the Women's Electoral Lobby media database. The research associate will assist with the analysis of the event data and will be responsible for producing reports to be made available to the public through Women's History Month and other means.

The first PhD scholar, supervised by Sawyer, will undertake the longitudinal study of women's policy machinery and related services in Australia.

The second PhD scholar, supervised by Maddison, will undertake the snapshot survey of the presence of feminist discourse in Australian-based internet sites.

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