

# 1 | Introduction: mobilization and social movements in the South – the challenges of inclusive governance<sup>1</sup>

LISA THOMPSON AND CHRIS TAPSCOTT

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed an upsurge in mobilization and collective action in states of the global South, which has continued to this day. While this mobilization in its early phases comprised part of either ongoing anti-colonial struggles for national independence or struggles against despotic rule (especially in Latin America), the forms of social movement to which this has given rise have mutated over the years and they now reflect a broad array of social, political and economic concerns differentially expressed at local, national and global levels. While the literature on social movements is vast and extends back nearly a century, it remains a truism that by far the bulk of the writing and theorizing in this field has been oriented to the analysis of movements in the global North.<sup>2</sup> There has been little attempt to engage with the writings of Southern scholars on the topic. Where research has focused attention on transitional states, social movements have invariably been analysed in terms of criteria derived from Northern experience. While some of this comparative work retains undeniable universal validity, a good deal of it clearly does not. In the absence of historically grounded empirical research, social movements in these societies and the struggles that underpin them are not infrequently reduced to caricature. This mode of investigation, typified by long-range event analysis, denies the complexity of social formations in the South, and, ignoring any prospect of agency, portrays their members as the hapless victims of tyrannical rulers and traditional culture or the passive recipients of Northern-led actions.

While the quest for meta-theory, with its all-embracing power of explanation, remains an alluring one for social and political scientists the world over, the latent weakness in the approach remains, as always, a lack of empirical validation across different social, political and historical contexts. As Oliver et al. (2003) point out, there is a need for mainstream theory to ‘continue to address a geographically and substantively broader empirical base, breaking out of a preoccupation with Anglo-America and

Europe and becoming truly global in its orientation. This broader base will open new empirical problems that will point to weaknesses in current theory and lead to the development of new theory.' They argue for a 'growing focus on mechanisms and processes that occur in many different movements, and decreasing attempts to develop universal propositions about the causes, effects or trajectories of whole movements' (ibid.).

Although this volume makes no pretence of advancing a coherent theoretical framework for understanding collective action and social movements<sup>3</sup> in the global South (if indeed such a project were feasible or academically useful), it does seek to present new understandings of the ways in which, and the reasons why, communities mobilize in the South. In so doing, it raises questions about the applicability of social movement theory based mainly on experiences in the North. While social movements in both the North and South have in common a desire to mobilize towards a collective goal, whether it be the attainment of rights denied or the reversal of adverse state policy, their genesis, form and orientation are likely in many, but not all, instances to be significantly different. As Stammers (2005, 2009) has pointed out, historically the attainment of rights in the North was the outcome of sustained social movement activity. In contrast, many social movements in the South have arisen as a consequence of the opportunities presented by rights entrenched in relatively recently instated constitutional democracies. In such contexts, social mobilization is, in many respects, aimed at achieving substantive citizenship which yields material gains.

This is not, however, to suggest that the extant body of social movement theory is irrelevant to experiences in the South, and the resonance of the dominant theoretical positions is to be found in virtually all of the case studies which follow in this volume. What is significantly different, however, is the departure point for an analysis of the factors that give rise to collective action and social movements in the South. On this point most Southern theorists concur, namely that the inequalities that prevail in the world political and economic order (and which have given rise to the descriptors North and South) have played and continued to play a major role in shaping relations of power and patterns of inequality within Southern states. The economic dependencies that have arisen as a consequence of the current world order, and the internal distortions that have arisen from this, however, have not been factored into analyses in the North simply because they have not been of any significance in understanding why and how social mobilization takes place in post-industrial societies.

Particularly since the end of the cold war and the emergence of the neoliberal consensus, which Castells (2003: 327), quoting Ramonet, calls '*la pensée unique*' (the only thinking), the linkages between exclusion at the level of the state and exclusion in global terms have become decidedly more pronounced. Marginalization in the South, and of the South, is a dominant characteristic of current global political and socio-economic processes. As Castells (ibid.: 325) states:

[t]he global economy is characterised by a fundamental asymmetry between countries, in terms of their levels of integration, their competitive potential, and share of benefits from economic growth ... [t]he consequence of this is the increased segmentation of the world population ... leading to increased inequality and social exclusion ... [t]his pattern of segmentation is characterised by a double movement: on the one hand, valuable segments of territories and people are linked to global networks ... [o]n the other hand, everything, and everyone, which does not have value, according to what is valued in the networks, or ceases to have value, is switched off the networks, and ultimately discarded altogether.

The effects of global capital on development and democracy have been emphasized in the older research and literature on mobilization and social movements in the South. Scholars such as Wignaraja (1993), Amin (1976, 1993), Kothari (1993, 2005) and Mamdani et al. (1993) drew on an eclectic mix of Marxist theory to underline the importance of social movements for state transformation. According to these perspectives, the structural effects of global neoliberalism, with the emphasis on markets and the transmission of modern technology, are key to an understanding of the reasons why more unified social resistance has not taken place in states labelled Third or even Fourth World. Nevertheless, and perhaps paradoxically, in the past decade the role of popular mobilization and social movements has increasingly been seen as central in pressuring states and global organizations to reconfigure the socio-economic order both within national boundaries and beyond.

Kabeer (2005: 23) discusses the importance of understanding collective action in terms of two axes of participation, horizontal and vertical. Horizontal forms of participation are the linkages forged between mobilized citizens and communities at local, national and global levels. Such horizontal spaces of participation, which might also be called 'self-created' or 'invented' spaces, are where citizens themselves define their modes of engagement with the state and with other interest groups and resort to different forms of collective action. These linkages are not necessarily