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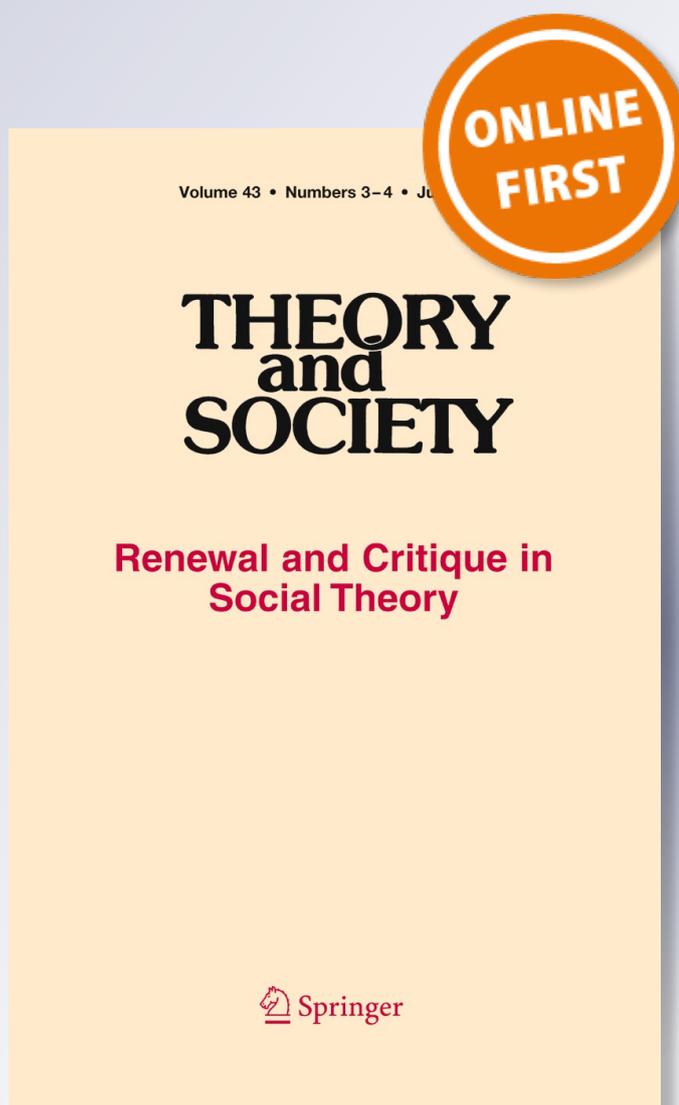
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Abstract This article proposes that by studying grievances as not only materially but also ideationally constituted claims, scholars can gain analytical leverage on puzzles of social movement emergence and development. This meaning-laden approach to grievances recognizes that the ideas with which some claims are imbued might be more conducive to motivating political resistance than others. The approach is inherently grounded in context—scholars begin by understanding the meanings that grievances take on in particular times and places. But it is also potentially generalizable; as scholars uncover the ways in which apparently different grievances may index similar ideas across time and place, those grievances can be categorized similarly and their potential relationship to social mobilization explored. Drawing on evidence from the 2000 Bolivian water wars, the article proposes that market driven threats to subsistence resources offer one such potential categorization.

How and why social movements emerge, develop, strengthen, and fade has long intrigued social science scholars.[1] In particular, three frameworks have emerged that dominate the social movement literature—resource mobilization, political opportunity, and the framing process (see McAdam et al. 1996, p. 7). The first two approaches stress factors outside the cause at the center of a movement to explain its emergence, whereas the framing approach suggests the importance of the relationship between the issue at hand and how people come to understand it. They are now largely understood to constitute one approach—the political process model (e.g., see Piven and Cloward 1977; McAdam 1982). Much current scholarship seeks to refine and to specify further how and when we might expect to see particular aspects of the political process model's elements at work, or it encourages scholars to push the model towards increased interactivity and attention to social construction (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001). Some scholars argue that attention to grievances can be subsumed by a political opportunity

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[1] See McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996) and Tarrow (1998) for an overview of social movement literature.

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approach, or that attention to frames sufficiently captures any additional leverage that analysis of grievance can provide, yet grievances remain under-theorized.

The most basic claim of this article is as follows: attention to the grievances around which a political protest emerges can add explanatory leverage to our understanding of the dynamics of contentious politics. I agree with David Snow and Sara Soule when they argue that, "none of the various sets of conditions necessary for the emergence and operation of social movements is more important that the generation of deeply felt shared grievances" (2010, p. 23). Yet dominant theories explicitly argue that grievances, although a necessary condition, are constant and therefore have little explanatory power. Other approaches simply assert that particular threats (such as erosion of rights, state repression, or declining economic opportunities) are more conducive to social movements than others without exploring the potential mechanisms at work.[2] I contend that systematically incorporating grievances into social movement analysis can give scholars the tools to develop richer understandings of the mechanisms at work in the political process model. Through addressing the substantive relationship between grievances and the structures of social mobilization, scholars can better explain how and why social movements emerge, develop, strengthen, and fade.

This article also makes the case for the value of a particular approach to studying grievances. Instead of paying attention to the perceived or relative *severity* of a grievance, as much of the early grievance literature did (e.g., Davies 1962, 1969; Smelser 1963; Geschwender 1968; Gurr 1970), this article builds on Snow et al.'s (1986) emphasis on grievance interpretation to encourage the study of the *meanings* with which grievances are imbued. When we approach the study of social movements—and grievances in particular—through the lens of meaning, we recognize that claims are both materially and ideationally constituted. The ideas with which some claims are imbued might be more conducive than others to motivating political resistance; by paying attention to meaning, we improve our ability to explain and analyze the dynamics of contention.

The article does *not* challenge the logic of the political process approach in its current incarnation; I do not seek to diminish the importance of mobilizing structures, political opportunities, and frames. This is also *not* an effort to return to relative deprivation, breakdown, or strain theories. A focus on relative deprivation tells us little about how grievances are part of semiotic systems; scholars were correct to turn away from these approaches. Instead, I argue that, by focusing not on materially based notions of the severity or types of grievances, but rather on the meanings with which those grievances are imbued, scholars can gain analytical leverage on puzzles of social movement emergence and development. By understanding grievances as meaning-laden, we can better explain why political opportunities are understood as such, why mobilizing structures are available to particular movements in particular moments, and why some frames, but not others, can bring large groups to the streets. I propose not to alter but rather to add to the political process model through a meaning-laden approach to grievances.

The approach proposed here starts with the proposition that meanings matter. Everything we do (or do not do) in the world tells us something about the environment

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[2] Some scholarship does focus directly on grievances. See, for example, D. A. Snow et al. (1998), and McVeigh (2009).

in which we are operating and has an effect on the ways in which our social and political worlds are constructed.[3] Our worlds are socially made, and the "things" we see in the world index and generate meanings beyond what we might take as their face value. I focus specifically on meanings as they relate to social movement grievances. I understand "grievance" to refer to the central claims a social movement is making—the practices, policies, or phenomena that movement members claim they are working to change (or preserve). For example, do participants claim to fight to stop climate change? To advocate for gay marriage? To reduce the size of government? All of these claims are imbued with ideas—they index and generate meanings beyond the fact of climate change, gay marriage, or the size of government. For example, gay marriage might be imbued with ideas of family, dignity, community, and partnership. The size of government might simultaneously index freedom, independence, heritage, justice, and social responsibility. Understanding these ideas adds leverage to our analysis of contentious politics.

The approach is inherently grounded in context—beginning by understanding the meanings that grievances take on in particular times and places. But it is also potentially generalizable; by uncovering the ways in which apparently different grievances may index similar ideas across time and place, we can categorize those grievances similarly and explore their potential relationship to social mobilization. By categorizing claims through specific attention to how they are materially and ideationally constituted, we can explore how grievances that appear to be materially distinct may be imbued with similar meanings and work in similar ways across space and time as a result. For example, Jake Kosek's (2006) research suggests that in some communities in New Mexico forests have come to signify self and community. Suzana Sawyer's (2004) work on oil extraction shows how, in some contexts in Ecuador, oil takes on similar meanings of self and community. While trees and oil are, materially, very different "things," they have taken on similar meanings in these particular contexts and might, when threatened, work in similar ways to produce resistance as a result.

Evidence from the 2000 water wars in Cochabamba, Bolivia suggests an additional potentially generalizable categorization.[4] The events in Cochabamba make the case for the analytical utility of a "subsistence" category of grievances. Market-driven threats to subsistence resources are a particularly powerful locus for collective action as they activate a combination of materially and ideationally driven concerns. Because of the meanings with which subsistence resources are likely to be imbued, threats to them are perceived not only as material threats, but also as threats to community—both imagined and otherwise. These perceptions then serve as grievances around which salient local divisions (e.g., cross-class, cross-sector or occupation, cross-gender, cross-ethnic, and cross-location—urban, peri-urban, and rural) can coalesce and broad based resistance can result.

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[3] Following John Comaroff, I take *meaning* to be "the economy of signs and symbols in terms of which humans construct, inhabit, and experience their social lives (and thus act in and upon the world)" (cited in Wedeen 2009, pp. 81–82).

[4] Some accounts of these events describe them as the "water war" in the singular. Others use the plural. I adopt the plural, "water wars" as there were multiple protest events, each of which can be understood and described as its own "war." Interestingly, most participants in the water wars call the entire set of events the "*guerra del agua*," using the singular. However, when they discuss different episodes of protest, they use the "*primera guerra del agua*" (the first water war) to refer to the January protests events, the "*segunda guerra del agua*" (the second water war) to refer to the February protest events, etc. The plural, therefore, while not a literal translation of they ways in which most participants name the events, remains true to how they describe them.

The article proceeds as follows. Part I both presents and critiques early grievance-based approaches, and discusses the various ways in which grievances, while sidelined, have remained present in some theoretical approaches. Part II develops the broad contours of a meaning-laden approach to grievances. It then proposes that one potential analytical category of grievances made possible through a meaning-laden approach is a focus on the similar mobilizing effects of market-driven threats to subsistence resources. The article concludes by showing the ways in which a focus on the mobilizing effects of water's meanings sheds light on the timing and composition of the Cochabamban water wars.

Part I

A lack of systematic attention to grievances is not the result of simple oversight, but rather an intentional effort to focus on variables seen as demonstrating greater variance (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam et al. 1988; Zald 1991). Critiques of early grievance-based approaches abound (e.g., Tilly et al. 1975; McCarthy and Zald 1977; McAdam 1999). The "constancy of discontent" as McAdam et al. call it, is at the core of many of these objections (McAdam et al. 1988).[5] While some defenders continued to voice support for strain or breakdown theories (e.g., Piven and Cloward 1992), the idea that grievances consistently outnumber social movements and therefore cannot provide the variation necessary for a convincing causal story has gone largely uncontested.[6] Indeed, by the late 1990s, it appeared as though the heavy criticism of grievance-centered approaches had relegated them to "the dustbin of failed social science theories" (D. A. Snow et al. 1998, p. 2).

For the argument I make here, two lines of critique are particularly relevant. In focusing on relative deprivation, or the *severity* of grievances, early grievance-based approaches operate as if it were possible somehow to index suffering. Furthermore, these approaches divorce grievances from the meanings they take on in particular times and places. While strain or breakdown theories are context dependent, they look at the world as constituted by individual cognitions, not semiotic practices. Again, I am not calling for a return to approaches grounded in the relative severity of grievances and how those interact with an individual's state of mind. Yet scholars need not have thrown the proverbial baby out with the bathwater; grievances have much to add to our understandings of social movement origins, dynamics, and trajectories.

The political process model—grievances as political opportunity and frame

With the rise of the political process model, social movement theory took a sharp and decisive turn away from grievances. Proponents of a political process approach focused

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[5] Sidney Tarrow offers a clear articulation of this line of reasoning: "Even a cursory look at modern history shows that outbreaks of collective action cannot be derived from the level of deprivation that people suffer or from the disorganization of their societies; for these preconditions are more constant than the movements they supposedly cause" (Tarrow 1998, p. 81). An additional line of critique focused assumptions of irrationality and disconnection embedded in strain theories (McAdam 1999). The movements of the 1960s suggested that participants could be both rational actors and highly embedded in dense social networks.
[6] For an important exception see D. Snow et al. (1986).

not on the claims movements made, but rather on the context in which they operated; the "world outside a social movement" became key to understanding movement dynamics (Meyer 2004, p. 126). Attention to resources external to the movement as well as the movement's organizational structures themselves, political context, and strategic efforts on the part of movement organizers to "frame" their message all contributed insights critical to our understandings of social movement dynamics and trajectories. While the political process model has been extensively critiqued (e.g., Gamson and Meyer 1996; Aminzade 2001; Goodwin et al. 2001; Goodwin and Jasper 2004) its contributions continue to serve as fundamental buildings blocks for much of contemporary social movement analysis.

Grievances and political opportunities

Most important for the theoretical propositions developed here are the ways in which political process approaches have treated grievances in their analyses. Perhaps most prominent is the tension created by variation in theoretical specification of the place of grievances in the concept of a political opportunity structure. Some scholars conceptualize both threat and grievance as part of the political opportunity structure, but others contend that grievances should be treated separately, if at all.[7] More importantly for this article, even when scholars understand grievances as a political opportunity, they often return to old paradigms, focusing on the "severity" of a grievance as opposed to its meaning (Meyer 2004; see D. A. Snow et al. 2005).

The continued thread of grievances within a political opportunity context appears most prominently in an interest in "threats." Tilly offers a sweeping theorization that threats are likely "to generate more collective action given the 'same' amount of opportunity" (1978, pp. 134–135). The distinction between "opportunity" and "threat" may obscure more than it clarifies, as a "threat" to one, may be understood as an "opportunity" to another (see also Goldstone and Tilly 2001).[8] Yet Tilly's general contention that the imposition of losses will likely generate more collective action than efforts to improve the status quo implicitly suggests that grievances matter. Particular *kinds* of grievances—those that seek to recoup or prevent losses—are more conducive than others to collective action. But the focus on threats remains general and relies not on context-dependent, meaning-making work, but rather on the loss aversion theories of cognitive psychology.[9]

Recent literature on threats moves beyond Tilly's general categorization, going so far as to identify particular grievances as offering the variation necessary to contribute to a causal account of social movement emergence. Much of this scholarship focuses on the work of a particular grievance (or collection of grievances) in a particular time or place. Studies of the Holocaust (Einwohner and Maher 2009; Maher 2010) identify specific dimensions of threat perception that are conducive to social mobilization and Almeida's (2003) analysis of protest movements in El Salvador turns to "state attributed economic

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[7] For example of the former see McCammon et al. (2001) and Van Dyke (2003). For the latter, see Snow et al. (2005).

[8] Goldstone and Tilly return to Tilly's earlier distinctions in continuing to advocate the separation of "threats" and "opportunities" in social movement analysis, yet they provide little guidance on how to theorize threats.

[9] The approach resonates most closely with prospect theory (e.g., Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

problems," "erosion of rights," and "state repression," (p. 351) as threats that are likely to motivate resistance. [10]

These authors offer important theorizing on how these particular grievances worked in these particular times and places. But they stop at telling us which perceived threats are more likely to produce collective action than others. Why those threats might be more powerful motivators than others, and how they might work to produce mobilization remains unexplored. [11] Furthermore, they offer little guidance in helping us understand how and why the groups that come together to respond to these threats identify as such. How and why particular threats might summon particular groups in particular ways goes unexplored. These kinds of analyses serve as important building blocks for the approach proposed here, suggesting that a theorization of grievances can add much to our understandings of the ways in which political context shapes social mobilization.[12] By considering the systematic ways in which semiotics may be at work, I propose to take the analysis discussed above one step further. When we understand grievances as meaning-laden we can begin to uncover some of the mechanisms at work in transforming political context into political opportunity and how group identifications are summoned by particular kinds of threats in particular ways.

Grievances and frames

Although grievances are clearly at the center of frame analysis, they are rarely independently problematized.[13] Leading framing scholars were quick to advocate for the inclusion of grievance interpretation in analyses of mobilization (see Snow et al. 1986). But their insights were largely deployed to think systematically through framing processes (e.g., frame alignment) as opposed to developing models of grievance interpretation. Ironically, some framing scholars are so interested in the "culturally embedded" nature of identity that they rarely take a step back to look at the systematic ways in which identifications might be produced as well as the causes of that production. By drawing our attention to the importance of the particular, framing approaches make a critical contribution. But in focusing on the ways in which collective identities are grounded in particular languages or semiotic systems, these studies often leave the potential for similarity across social contexts unexplored.[14]

However, it is possible that similarities *across* social worlds create the opportunity for similarly understood problems to produce resonant collective action frames. Problems understood to have similar meanings may generate resonate frames in multiple

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[10] Einwohner and Maher argue that when information is credible, threats understood to be "unsurvivable, imminent, applicable to local actors, and nonmalleable" are most likely to produce mobilization (2009, p. 30).
[11] Ioannis Evrigenis's (2008) work takes a different approach, turning to political theory to explore connections between fear and collective action.
[12] For example, Van Dyke and Soule's (2002) analysis of militia organizations looks implicitly at type of threat by identifying "structural transformations" as potential triggers for militia organizing. Their explicit focus, however, remains on the severity of the grievance as they find evidence for their hypothesis based on continuous measures of economic restructuring. These findings offer important building blocks for a theorization of grievances rooted in attention to meaning-making. One might want to study, for example, the particular kinds of economic restructuring that was taking place in militia-heavy areas and what meanings those changes took on.
[13] See Mueller (1992, p. 5) for the importance of grievances in frame analysis.
[14] In particular see Gamson (1992, p. 60).

contexts. Indeed, to explore fully the potential contribution of attention to frames, we need to push beyond an approach where all of the relevant dynamics of meaning can be black-boxed by terms such as "resonate."[15] The term is often deployed today, particularly in the context of the literature on collective action, to refer to sympathetic or positive emotional responses to something. If a frame "resonates," we understand it to have evoked emotions, images, or memories. Systematic attention to grievances can aid in reconciling this challenge, helping us to understand better how and why frames "resonate" in the ways they do by giving us tools with which to explore how and why particular emotions, images, or memories might be triggered by particular threats.

Which frames resonate and when may, indeed, be highly contingent—similar grievances in a physical sense could resonate with different ethnic or national identities or with different myths or historical experiences and take on different meanings as a result. Yet which frame is developed and how becomes the secondary question. Instead, the question should be whether there is something systematic about the way the *problems themselves* are understood that is likely to generate collective action frames. The framing literature helps us understand how frames work but not whether there is something systematic about the meanings that make those frames possible and potent.[16]

To continue with the frame metaphor, particular frames or categories of frames will fit particular pictures or bear particular loads, while others will not. Certain issues in certain communities will be more easily translated or constructed in such a way as to have enough motivational power to become a rallying point for collective action. We are left with two questions: (1) Why do certain frames resonate in some times and places and not others? (2) Can we develop systematic approaches to understanding this variation? It is possible that when particular categories of grievances are at stake, different contexts can work in similar ways. Attention to the content of a movement's claims and analysis of those claims as meaning laden can help us better understand which frames might resonate in which contexts and which will be unlikely to bear the load.

To understand why a frame resonates, we must, as Deborah Gould argues, attend "to how people make sense of themselves and their worlds" (2009, p. 166).

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[15] Thanks to Elisabeth Clemens for helping bring this to my attention. The etymology of the word can be traced back to a reverberating sound or echo. Yet even the metaphor of the frame suggests problems with the concept of frame resonance. A frame is something outside of something else—it is a boarder designed to enhance the appearance of a picture inside or a basic structure designed to bear a load. The ways in which scholars deploy the frame metaphor places meanings somehow on the outside, while simultaneously insisting on a frame's embeddedness. It is difficult to reconcile the two, and this, I argue, is at the root of many of the challenges inherent in using the concept of a frame to understand better the processes of political contention.

[16] Snow and Benford (1992) begin to tackle these questions when they argue that potency of the frame depends on its resonance, which in turn depends on the "empirical credibility, experimental commensurability, and ideational centrality or narrative fidelity" of the frame itself (p. 140). By empirical credibility, the authors refer to the "apparent evidential basis for a master frame's diagnostic claims" (ibid., p. 140). Experiential commensurability suggests direct experience with a problem, and ideational centrality refers to how well the frame "rings true" with a given contextual system. This is as close as they come to theorizing grievances.

[17] In her analysis of social mobilization around AIDS in the 1980s, Gould offers one analytical tool for understanding variation in frame resonance. Gould looks to shifts in "emotional habitus" to explain why a frame might not resonate in one moment, whereas years later the same frame may resonate powerfully among the same group of people. Gould clearly shows how a confrontational frame did not work effectively in the early 1980s—when the emotional habitus centered on grief, gentility, and respectability—but became the core of the movement after the Bowers v. Hardwick decision made anger a more acceptable and accessible emotional response.

[17] But the second question remains: are there systematic, cross-contextual relationships between the meaning of a grievance and the power of a particular frame? The symbolic worlds of actors and the frames that mobilize them are clearly an important part of the puzzle. By looking at grievances as meaning-laden, I build on assumptions employed by the framing literature, most importantly the idea that objects are discursively malleable. I then look specifically to preexisting discursive conditions. By studying preexisting conditions, I can begin to understand why a frame might work the way it does in a particular time and place. I anticipate that there might be similarities in discursive conditions across cases that can help provide additional depth to social movement scholarship. It is theoretically possible that certain *categories* of grievances, where the category is produced by the meaning of the grievance, not its physical attributes, are more likely to resonate than others.[18] Certain "problems" may be systematically conducive to the formation of an easily prioritized identity, and particular events that highlight, create, or expose those problems might favor identification with a category particularly conducive to participation in organized resistance.[19] In paying attention to meanings prior to any framing done by movement activists, we can both think about different kinds of categories of grievances and uncover mechanisms at work in broad patterns of frame resonance.

Attention to the ways in which water can be framed sheds light on why the water movement in Cochabamba, Bolivia garnered broad support. Yet the events suggest the need to explore whether similar ideas about particular grievances—for example, whether they index survival or luxury, threaten a particular group's livelihood, or can be seen to be a regional or national problem—generate similar responses of protest or quiescence. While grievances are at the center of frame analysis, I propose we take our analysis one step further and ask how and why a grievance becomes particularly resonant at one time or place but not another, and whether there are patterns to how and why certain grievances resonate. I propose that there is potential for systematic similarities between grievances with "potent" frame resonance.

The "cultural turn" and grievances

The recent "cultural turn" in social movement theory opens the door for renewed attention to grievances (for example, see Johnston et al. 1994; Goodwin et al. 2001; Goodwin and Jasper 2004). In 1994, Johnston et al. described grievances as a "forgotten theoretical issue" (p. 20) and argued that "new social movement" research had brought grievances back to the fore. Yet while some of this literature draws attention to connections between shared feelings of injustice and strong collective identity attachments, it does not offer a systematic theorization of

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[18] Whether a grievance fits into the broad category may be highly locally contingent. This article argues that grievances can be both defined contextually and systematically categorized. Snow and Benford (1992) argue that whether a frame resonates or does not depends on its empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and ideational centrality.

[19] See Gould (1995) for a discussion of participant identities and how certain identities can be brought to the fore in certain moments.

different kinds of grievances and how they might work differently to prompt resistance. Attention to grievances as meaning-laden can shed light on when identities are brought to the fore or emotions are amplified.

Jasper's work on "moral shocks" does look systematically at grievances and the ways they work (Jasper 1997). These shocks, Jasper argues, generate a visceral unease strong enough to generate mobilization even in the absence of preexisting networks.[20] Individuals are moved emotionally by an act that violates conceptions of morality and those emotions explain social movement participation. Jasper offers a critical conceptual contribution as he suggests not only that grievances can be categorized but also that they should be analyzed as part of the fabric of social interaction.[21] Yet in their critique of Jasper, Polletta and Amenta correctly observe that "virtually any event or new piece of information can be called in retrospect a moral shock" and enjoin scholars to "ask what it is about certain events that create such anger, outrage, and indignation in those exposed to them that they are driven to protest." They go on to ask, "Are some *kinds of issues* more likely to generate moral shocks than others?" (Polletta and Amenta 2001, p. 307).

The analysis presented here is a direct response to Polletta and Amenta's call. I propose that we build on Jasper's insight and explore why a threat to one issue or good might be understood as a "moral" shock in some times and places and not in others. A key component of this analysis is further exploration of the connections between meaning-making and emotions. As Deborah Gould reminds us, "emotion incites, shapes, and is generated by practices of meaning-making" (Gould 2009, p. 13). Emotions are part of how we make meaningful sense of our worlds and determine what might or might not be a grievance; after all, "grievances are only grievances because they upset or outrage people" (Jasper 1997, p. 126). When we understand grievances as meaning-laden we can better understand which grievances might work to produce moral shocks or other emotions conducive to social mobilization and which might not. We could think systematically about the ways in which particular categories of claims might be likely to produce particular feeling states and how those feeling states might be linked to social movement emergence or growth.

The circumstances of the emergence and development of the Cochabamban water movement suggests that a focus on what certain events mean and an effort to think systematically about those meanings will bear empirical and theoretical fruit—social movement theory needs to bring the role of the grievance back in. I do not wish to argue that grievances alone can explain social movement emergence. Instead, I propose that the logic presented here works to complement, not compete with dominant paradigms. Scholars of contentious politics must pay careful attention not only to resources, opportunities, and frames, but also to how those resources, opportunities,

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[20] Jasper defines a moral shock as "an unexpected event or piece of information [which] raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action, with or without the network of personal contacts emphasized in mobilization and process theories" (1997, p. 106).

[21] Jasper also suggests that different categories of grievances might produce different types of social movements. Environmental concerns, he asserts, are more likely to be interpreted globally and thus lend themselves to broad-based movements, while social concerns may be less likely to transcend cleavages and protest movements will be more parochial as a result (Jasper 1997, p. 285). He does not, however, explore the potential theoretical insight of his point.

or frames become available and why they are available to some movements and not to others.[22] Attention to the grievance—understood as constituted by material and symbolic claims and conceptions— can help to shed light on these prior questions. When we understand grievances as meaning-laden we can better explore the mechanisms through which shifting political structures or policies are understood as opportunities, why some resources are effective mobilizing tools some of the time but not always, and why particular frames "work" when they do.[23] While resources, political opportunities, and frames remain critical to the story, by taking the meaning of the grievance into account we can add depth to our tale.

The persistence of grievances in social movement research

Even though social movement theory turned explicitly and decisively away from grievances with the political process model, some literature continued to pay attention to the types of claims movements made, as well as their perceived severity. This scholarship serves as an important starting point for the argument developed here. Mayer Zald's (1991) distinction between "hard" and "soft" grievances offers valuable conceptual foundations. "Hard grievances," Zald argues, "are those in which a large fraction of some population is exposed to clear change or chance of change in their living conditions" (ibid., p. 349).[24] Soft grievances, however, "are subtle in their impact, more prone to changing social definitions." Zald appears to be defining soft grievances as those that, while potentially devastating for those who experience them, change slowly over time and, as a result, motivate little collective action. Hard grievances, however, "more rapidly and clearly lead to collective action" (ibid., p. 349).[25]

Zald's distinction offers important theorizing on grievances. Unfortunately, it has gained little traction in social movement analysis. The theory developed here approaches the issue from a different angle. Zald's distinction remains firmly grounded in material understandings of grievances.[26] I propose to explore the potential

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[22] The case I want to make is similar to the one that Deborah Gould proposes with respect to emotions and social movement theorizing (2004). In her entreaty to bring emotions back in, Gould argues that attention to emotions will help scholars better theorize "the relationship between political opportunities, frames, and resources on the one and, and movement emergence and decline on the other" (ibid., p.n 164). Just as theorizations of the experience of feelings can help us better understand when frames might resonate, why a moment is understood as an "opportunity" or how a movement builds resources, attention to the meanings with which grievances are imbued can help us understand variation that the political process model leaves un- or under-explained.

[23] I further elaborate on the relationships between the grievances and opportunities, resources and frames in both the case analysis and the concluding section of this article.

[24] Interestingly for the subsistence category of grievances proposed here, Zald offers "a potato famine in a country dependent on potatoes as the main staple [or] an overnight doubling of the price of bread, where bread is a staple" (1991, p. 349) as examples of "hard" grievances.

[25] Here Zald's findings are reminiscent of Walsh's (1981) research on the response to the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island (indeed, Zald cites Kischelt's work on the subject) and his assertion that "suddenly imposed grievances" are more likely to trigger collective action.

[26] Zald's concern that "critical and hermeneutic analysis conducted without close attention to the links between societal and cultural change and specific movement mobilization will once more lead to reified assertions about the conditions of life an alienation, only loosely connected to the real life situations and real political consequences confronting actors" (1991, pp. 351–352) is well-placed. Yet analysis attentive to meaning making need not reify its subjects nor remove itself from "real life."

mechanisms at work in his contribution by asking scholars to think about the ways in which meanings might work differently if grievances are imposed in different ways. For example, a rapid price increase due to the elimination of a subsidy might take on a different meaning than rapid price increases resulting from crop failures. An approach attentive to meaning-making can help us uncover the mechanisms at work in Zald's distinction, shedding light on why and how mobilization surfaces as well as why it might not take place every time a community experiences a "hard" grievance.

Certainly new circumstances (e.g., the imposition of a new grievance) can change the way we understand the world around us. Rory McVeigh's study of the Ku Klux Klan shows how grievances "can alter the way in which people interpret their circumstances and they can generate new incentives for right-wing mobilization" (2009, p. 38) as a result.[27] Yet we must also ask the prior question: how do people interpret their circumstances before the imposition of a particular grievance and how might that interpretation inform their response? An approach attentive to meaning making focuses on exactly this question while also allowing us to think systematically about which categories of grievances are likely to be interpreted in ways that are conducive to generating collective action.

Scholars of civil war and violence are also among those who pay explicit attention to the relationship between specific grievances and community responses. However, much of this scholarship concludes that attention to grievances provides little explanatory leverage. In their econometric analysis of civil war outbreak, Collier and Hoeffler find that "objective indicators of grievance add little explanatory power" (2004, p. 588). Fearon and Laitin produce similar results, finding that there is "little evidence that one can predict where a civil war will break out by looking for where ethnic or other broad political grievances are strongest" (2003, p. 75). Instead, "conditions that favor *insurgency*" appear as powerful explanations of variation in civil violence.

These large-N studies do much to uncover potentially powerful macro-trends in political resistance. However, they cannot be attentive to the kinds of variation this article proposes we explore. Grievances that appear to be the same cannot always be coded as such. What those grievances mean in a local context will change their potential for generating resistance. Only interpretive work can help us understand how and why income inequality, poverty, or even nationalism can have different

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[27] For McVeigh, a decrease in an actor's status or economic or political purchasing power creates a shift in interpretive processes that then "alters the way in which individuals understand their circumstances and creates new framing opportunities for those who wish to organize collective action" (2009, p. 49). The argument offers yet another angle from which renewed attention to grievances appears to be both theoretically and empirically rewarding. Indeed, McVeigh offers an example of the categorical theorization of grievances advocated here. McVeigh's analysis does suggest a number of questions. It is unclear why attention to grievances should be limited to right-wing mobilizations. Furthermore although interpretive frames are critical for McVeigh, movement leaders play an indispensible role in their construction. The frames resonate widely because of the power devaluations experienced by target groups. But Klan organizers carefully crafted these frames to ensure maximum resonance. McVeigh does, indeed, look behind the frame to uncover a broadly shared and culturally resonant grievance. But movement leaders continue to do much of the work to translate those grievances into social mobilization. It is almost as if grievances become meaning laden only when savvy movement organizers describe them as such. Klan members appear as economically, politically, and socially aggrieved members of society, willing to channel those grievances into demands for privileges for native-born, white Protestants.

meanings in different times and places, thus playing different roles in the origins of social movements or civil wars. [28]

Most recently, David A. Snow and Sara E. Soule make the case for considering "mobilizing grievances" (2010). These grievances, they argue, are "shared among some number of actors…[and] are felt to be sufficiently serious to warrant not only collective complaint but also some kind of corrective, collective action" (ibid., p. 24). The concept does carve out a particular category of grievances, highlighting a distinction between grievances that might be experienced individually and those that are likely to be shared. But the examples they offer leave us wondering what exactly the distinction is. Might waiting in a long line at a gas station or a grocery store—both examples of individual grievances that Snow and Soule offer—not lead to collective action in some circumstances? Or even dissatisfaction with a boss, a raise, or an office procedure (ibid., p. 25)? It depends on how these grievances are interpreted. In certain contexts, dissatisfaction with a boss might be experienced as a shared feature of a particular workplace, industry, or even economic system. After all, dissatisfaction with a boss, a raise, or an office procedure all seem like exactly the kinds of things that labor unions (collectively and sometimes contentiously) work to address.

We are left looking for tools to understand when a grievance will be understood collectively (and, thus, have the potential to become a mobilizing grievance) and when it will remain an individual experience. Even as Snow and Soule draw our attention to the importance of grievance interpretation (ibid., pp. 47–50) they leave us without a systematic approach to thinking about what kinds of grievances might lend themselves to be understood not only as "shared," but also as "sufficiently serious" to be likely to function as mobilizing grievances.[29] I propose that an approach attentive to the ways in which grievances that appear to be the same may index different things in different times and places will help to answer this question. If we think about the meanings a grievance takes on, we might better understand when it will be interpreted collectively and when it will be deemed "sufficiently serious."

Snow and Soule acknowledge that context is key. It can provide the resources necessary to construct frames, which can then shape understandings of "events and conditions." (ibid., p. 58). They suggest that there is value in thinking about how grievances are materially and ideationally constituted prior to the emergence of a social movement. But their discussion stops at how those meanings are drawn on to produce movement frames. I build on their analysis to push scholars to think about the

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[28] Some civil war literature does take a closer look at grievances, often focusing on environmental or spiritual grievances, and studies the violence—both organized and unorganized—that emerges when these claims or practices are threatened. Although Baechler's (1998) and Homer-Dixon's (1999) analyses suffer from several flaws, both authors make an explicit attempt to connect environmental scarcity to social effects. Through a focus on environmental issues, these scholars attempt to draw links between a particular category of grievance and systematic individual or communal reactions. In Peluso and Watts's (2001) edited volume on violence and the environment, contributors pay more careful attention both to the "*processes* by which violence occurs" (p. 22, emphasis in original) and the importance of meanings and identities in those processes. Yet the emphasis in their analysis remains on the process and symbolic meaning of the *struggles*, not on the grievances around which these struggles are taking place. For example, in the same volume, Nandini Sundar, who is attentive to the power of national patrimonial frames in contestation around Indian forestry claims, does not explore how or why these frames become possible.

[29] I recognize that this is not their intention. The chapter does a great job of meeting their stated goals, offering an excellent contribution to critiques of current treatments of grievances in the social movement literature.

possibilities for systematic analysis of how those meanings then work to create opportunities, mobilize resources, and make frames available. By coming to understand the meanings with which material conditions are imbued, scholars can better interpret not only how movement leaders draw on context to produce frames but also how we might categorize grievances to analyze political resistance more effectively.

Part II

A meaning-laden approach

There is a rich tradition of taking culture seriously in social movement analysis. As articulated above, the "cultural turn" draws our attention to questions of identity and the ways in which movements themselves are implicated in the constant contestation of semiotic systems while framing perspectives carefully analyze the meaning work done by movement activists. Here I focus the lens of social movement theory on the meaning work done by grievances—understood as claims that are both materially and ideationally constituted—and how that work can help to explain the mechanisms behind the emergence and composition of political protest. The approach does not focus on the deliberate work that social movement activists do to articulate grievances and construct resonate frames or, more generally, on how people "do things" with culture (Williams 2007). Nor does it treat systems of symbols as static, coherent, or fixed, in the way that some scholarship suggests [30]; I seek to take neither an agentive nor a structural approach to culture.

Instead, this article draws on an anthropological conceptualization of culture as "semiotic practices" (e.g., see William H. Sewell 1999; Wedeen 2002) to look behind the agency oriented approaches that dominate the cultural social movement literature. This approach pays particular attention to "what language and symbols *do*—how they are inscribed into concrete actions and how they operate to produce observable political effects" (Wedeen 2002, p. 714), as opposed to what actors do with them. These meanings are constantly contested, both by chronologically linear processes of change and by the multiple significations that may exist within social groups. When we look at how symbols operate in the world, understanding them as dynamic and conflicted, we can begin to ask questions about why and how meanings might work to help generate moments of collective political protest.

To ask these questions, the article builds specifically on Williams's efforts to understand "the cultural contexts in which movements grow, flourish, and wither" (2007, p. 95) by honing in on the meanings with which grievances are imbued. Instead of simply taking the "cultural environment" as a unit of analysis, I suggest that a closer parsing of the work that symbols do can give us analytical leverage on the mechanisms involved in movement emergence and composition.[31] By focusing our attention on the

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[30] Here I am drawing on a widely accepted critique of Clifford Geertz's work on Indonesia (Geertz 1973, 1980; Wedeen 2002).

[31] In discussing where and how discourse analysis is useful as a method for studying social movements, Hank Johnston writes that such studies are best suited to the "'hows' of ideation in social movement development rather than the 'whys' of general mobilizing processes" (Johnston 2002, p. 72). I propose that by focusing on the work that language and symbols *do*, discourse analysis can, indeed, serve as a useful method for explaining the "whys" of mobilizing processes.

ways in which different grievances are imbued with similar or different meanings in different contexts, we can think of grievances differently from their treatment as the relative gain or loss of a material "thing" or as set of political privileges. In his study of Argentine protest, Javier Auyero argues that we must look carefully at the "local mediations through which adjustment is implemented and out of which protest develops" (Auyero 2001, p. 35) and encourages us to analyze "the ensemble of mechanisms and processes at the root of collective claim making" (ibid., p. 35). I build on Auyero's insight by calling on scholars to treat semiotic practices as one of those mechanisms.

Williams similarly encourages us think about the "*socially and culturally available* array of symbols and meanings from which movements can draw" (2007, p. 96, emphasis in original). These symbols and meanings inform our understandings of what a grievance "is." When we approach analysis with this lens, it is quickly clear that context is key—the same things (actions, objects, ideas, etc.) cannot always be coded the same. Furthermore, by understanding grievances as embedded in cultural context, we can productively engage with the ways in which the claims themselves, not simply whether or how those claims are articulated by movement entrepreneurs, shape social movement outcomes.[32]

The basic argument is that while grievances maintain material power, their ideational aspects, as well as the reciprocal relationship between the two, play a critical role in developing understandings of what the grievance "is." All grievances have a powerful ideational component. The challenge is in trying to determine what those ideas are and what work they might do in helping us better understand patterns of political mobilization. Here, Clifford Geertz (1973) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1973) provide useful guidance. Borrowing from Gilbert Ryle (1971), Geertz offers an illustrative, and now famous, example of "thick description." Two individuals close and open an eye rapidly. The movements appear identical, yet one is "an involuntary twitch; the other a conspiratorial signal to a friend" (Geertz 1973, p. 6). A twitch and a wink appear the same, yet their meanings are decidedly different. Thick description does not merely include the action, but also pays careful attention to the meanings with which the action is imbued. If we are attentive to these differences we can begin to categorize grievances by the ideas they index as opposed to their apparent materiality.

Wittgensteinian ordinary-language philosophy is another useful tool as it draws our attention to the importance of words and images (see Wittgenstein 1973). Wittgenstein suggests that we can find the meaning of a word in the way it is used. As Aletta Norval describes it, "a Wittgensteinian approach draws attention to the practices shaping our (political) life" (2006, p. 242).[33] The approach offers a particularly powerful foundation

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[32] In his study of collective action in the Owens Valley, sociologist John Walton (1992) pays explicit attention to the role that meaning plays in generating collective action, but stops just short of theorizing the grievance itself. In all three cases he studies, Walton notes that "the combination of hardship and the meanings and purposes generated by culture and ideology provides the most telling explanations for collective action" (ibid., p. 319). He calls on scholars to treat culture as "prior to and more fundamental than the terms within" the dominant models of collective action and argues that "the interplay of culture and ideology *precede* particular mobilization strategies, give meaning and purpose to group organization, and determine the interests, organization, and mobilization methods available to a population or a community" (ibid., p. 324, emphasis added). The causal role for meanings in Walton's account is clear, yet whether a particular category of goods might work to produce similar meanings across space and time remains unexplored, as is the work that perceptions of the grievance (water in this case) itself may be doing to motivate and shape protest.

[33] Hannah Pitkin's (1972) recounting of the quarrel between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic* about what justice "is" offers an illustrative example.

understanding grievances as meaning-laden. For example, far before water becomes a grievance around which a community mobilizes it may signify regional struggle, ethnic heritage, or community dignity. To answer the question "what is water?" with "community dignity" is no less correct than to answer "the combination of two hydrogen and one oxygen atoms in liquid form." What water *is* varies depending on the context. The same speaker might answer the question differently in different contexts, whereas for some speakers, the correct answer to "what is water" may never be "community dignity." Furthermore, a Wittgensteinian approach focuses our analytical lens not on abstract theorizations, but rather on routine practices and seeks to reveal how these practices constitute identifications.[34]

As the proceeding discussion should make clear, I understand the relationship between the material and the ideational in grievances as reciprocal. Drawing on Lisa Wedeen's analysis of the relationship between discourse and institutions, I argue that what might be considered the "material" aspects of a grievance and the meanings that grievance takes on "are defined and generated in reference to one another" (Wedeen 2008, p. 49). The meanings with which grievances are imbued should be considered a product of what we might understand to be their materiality. At the same time, those meanings themselves help to determine and define how we understand that very material value. As Wedeen has argued, "material interests might be fruitfully viewed not as objective criteria but as being discursively produced: in other words, what counts as material interest is mediated through our language about what 'interest' means and what the material is" (ibid., p. 183). Furthermore, the relationship is not static. Instead, the "ideational" and the "material" continually work in ways that are "reciprocally determining, that is, mutually implicated in the changes that each undergoes through time" (ibid., p. 49). Voting is not simply the act of putting a marked piece of paper in a ballot box to select a political leader. Instead, it has a host of different meanings for different actors in different contexts. As a result, restricting or expanding voting privileges may mean different things in different times and places to different people.

Whereas many social movements can and do deploy alternative conceptions that unsettle dominant cultural meanings (Alvarez et al. 1998, p. 7), they can also grow directly from those dominant meanings. Indeed, they may emerge precisely because widely shared practices of meaning making are at risk. In the case of the water wars, a movement emerged precisely at the moment when two practices that pervade social encounters were put into tension with each other, when the practices that constitute a globalized, marketized world put at risk practices that produce and reproduce conceptions of community.

But even as this article proposes a move towards cultural context, it is also explicitly focused on the potential for developing analytical categories of grievances with generalizable purchase. Apparently different claims in decidedly different contexts— say the demand for nationalized water systems in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and appeals for affordable tortillas in Mexico City, Mexico—may taken on similar meanings and, as a result, generate protest through similar mechanisms. We would then want to think

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[34] Furthermore, context does not simply mean reference to a particular region or time period, but also refers to the actions that are undertaken in relationship to a particular statement, the felicitous conditions accompanying the utterance, the "grammar" of particular concepts, and the micro circumstances of a statement in relation to other statements. Water may be H_2O to some people in some times and places, and it may be community to others—in the same time and place.

about the processes through which those meanings are produced and reproduced, trying to identify why and how apparently different material goods take on similar meanings. We could then create a broader analytical category for the type of grievance (for example, market-driven subsistence resource threats) and do systematic research to understand the ways in which similar moments in which the grievance (defined materially and ideationally) is present might produce similar patterns of resistance in different contexts.

Think, for example, of something like property taxes. Isaac Martin (2008) deftly shows how increases in property taxes sparked grassroots resistance across the United States in the 1970s. If we were to conduct a worldwide study and treat property taxes as the grievance—understood purely as increased payments to the government for property ownership—we might find that these kinds of tax increases sparked local "rebellions" only in very few cases. What property taxes *mean* to many people in the US context matters to how we understand Martin's case. Yet if we think about property taxes as meaning-laden, we might be able to place them within a different kind of category. For example, we might code them not as instances of property tax increases (though they would, of course, still be exactly that), but rather as violations of expectations of the state. If we understand low property taxes as part of this "expectations of the state" category we can think about the meanings these kinds of expectations might take on and theorize patterns of resistance based on those meanings. In some places for some people those expectations may have to do with a certain type of taxes or a particular tax rate, for others they may have to do with particular services. We might then be able to code increases in property taxes in the United States similarly to, for example, threats to low cost healthcare in countries where the provision of such care is widely expected. If we look at the two grievances in purely "material" terms we would never code them similarly. Yet if we understand them as meaning-laden—as expectations of government that have come to mean freedom or independence—we can code them as belonging to a similar category of phenomena. We can then begin to think about how violations of expectations of the state might work similarly in different times and places to produce similar patterns of political resistance.

Below, I elaborate briefly on the possibilities created by thinking broadly about another potential categorization of grievances—market-driven subsistence threats—and propose a working hypothesis for how the meanings with which subsistence resources are imbued may systematically help to generate mobilization in the face of market driven threats. One can imagine the potential for similar theoretical work around the expectations of the state category proposed above as well as a variety of others where the category is created by the meanings the grievance takes on as opposed to its purely material attributes.

One potential category: a focus on subsistence

For any social scientist seeking to theorize grievances, subsistence resource threats likely come quickly to mind as a potentially productive analytical category. Yet the relationships among marketization, subsistence, and social movements remain undertheorized. E. P. Thompson's (1971) account of eighteenth-century English food riots, James Scott's (1976) work on the subsistence ethic in Southeast Asia, William Sewell's (1980) study of French revolutionary activity, and Cynthia McClintock's (1984, 1998)

analysis of the rise of the *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru offer accounts of social mobilization and resistance when subsistence resources are threatened. Taken together, these analyses show that subsistence issues are present in social mobilizations across space and time, suggesting that further theorization of subsistence is warranted.[35] How and why subsistence plays such a powerful role, however, is not the explicit focus of their research.[36]

In addition, while each author focuses on a particular good in his or her analysis (e.g., bread or rice), the word "food," is often used synonymously with a more particular good. By failing to disentangle the ways in which food prices generally may work differently from, for example, bread prices specifically, the authors miss the opportunity to explore the particularities of subsistence. Furthermore, by focusing purely on the "nourishment" that subsistence goods provide, Scott in particular overlooks the ways in which the material and the symbolic work to constitute each other, and how the symbolic may play a role in producing contention. The argument developed here builds on these scholars' insights, answering questions suggested by, but not answered in their analyses.

More recently, a small team of social movement scholars seeking to refine breakdown theories focused on subsistence threats as a "quotidian disruption" (D. A. Snow et al. 1998). David Snow and his colleagues argue that it is not the "suddenness" of grievances that triggers collective action (Walsh 1981; e.g., Zald 1991) but "rather the disruption of the daily order of things" (1998, p. 7). The authors offer a thorough theorization of both a general category of grievance (quotidian disruption) and specific sub-categories. Among the sub-categories of events that can produce movement-triggering quotidian disruptions are "dramatic alterations in subsistence routines" (1998, p. 9). Snow et al. draw a connection between the inability of large numbers of people to subsist in the manner to which they are accustomed and social mobilization.

I take Snow et al.'s theorizing one step further to explore the semiotic dimension of daily routine; there is more to the patterns that develop than the material disruption of the quotidian. The importance of meaning-making processes may be implicit in Snow et al.'s analysis, but they do not explore the implications of those processes, particularly for the causal mechanisms that may be at work when subsistence routines are threatened. Daily routines signify particular things to particular people in particular times and places.[37] I propose that subsistence goods, as well as the routines developed to cultivate, consume, and celebrate them, are likely to take on meanings beyond their

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[35] They are not, however, the only social science analyses that demonstrate connections between subsistence and contention. In particular, see Bouton's (1993) historical account of the 1774 "freeing" of the grain trade in France and the riots that followed. Bouton draws heavily on Thompson's conception of moral economy.

[36] McClintock's important analysis draws our attention to subsistence but focuses on the connection between hunger and peasant revolt (1984, p. 82) without exploring the ways in which a subsistence crisis may be about far more than physical hunger pangs.

[37] Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* adds important leverage to our understanding of how routine practices constitute our social worlds (1990 1977, 1990). Bourdieu understands *habitus* to be the socially constructed schemas that operate without conscious awareness to structure our worlds. They are taken for granted and as common sense or "natural." They are so much a part of our lives that we engage them without questioning their social production. *Habitus* helps us navigate the world by acknowledging that many of its elements seem obvious, and, as a result, they fall away from our conscious analysis of why we do what we do (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). The concept of *habitus* helps us understand the ways in which subsistence practices create meaning in our lives, even if the meanings those practices take on are often taken for granted.

material value. If we understand these routines, as well as the goods around which they form, as signifying particular ideas, beliefs, and values we can further uncover the mechanisms at work in the connection between subsistence disruption and collective action that Snow et al. identify. I theorize the processes that these scholars suggest but do not explore.

I specifically hypothesize that, because of the meanings with which subsistence resources are likely to be imbued, market driven threats to them are likely to be perceived as threats to community—both imagined (Anderson 1991) and "quotidian." [38] These perceived threats are then likely to systematically serve as grievances around which salient local divisions (e.g., cross-class, cross-sector or occupation, cross-gender, cross-ethnic, and cross-location—urban, peri-urban, and rural) can coalesce. As a result, market-driven subsistence resource threats are particularly conducive to large-scale, broad-based social mobilization.

While a variety of threats to subsistence resources may have implications for sustained, organized resistance, I focus here on one specific type of subsistence threat—those that result from market oriented economic reforms. These particular kinds of subsistence resource threats may contribute to similar patterns of resistance in ways that, for example, threats created by natural disasters, do not. First, market-oriented policy reforms can create clear targets for resistance movements—a government policy to alter or a private company to regulate. Second, the symbolic importance of a subsistence good can motivate resistance rooted in claims that the good should not be subject to the vicissitudes of markets.

Defining and identifying

To think carefully about how a subsistence resource argument is applicable across space and time, a definition of subsistence resources is necessary. I want to draw explicit attention to the importance of local understandings (where "local" may be as small as a neighborhood or as large as a nation). The definition I use has two central components. First, the resource or good must be understood by claimants to be necessary for survival and for which substitution is either impossible or highly undesirable. Although humans need not consume corn to survive, if corn has formed a central component of a regional diet in such a way that communities do not understand it to be substitutable (e.g., with rice or wheat), corn may come to be understood as a subsistence resource. The caloric or nutritional contribution of a good like corn may be relatively easily found in other resources. What matters for this definition is that claimants do not believe that bread is a substitute for corn. A subsistence resource is understood as such because of its role in producing and reproducing a way of life. [39]

Second, claimants must either understand other members of their perceived community to have or they must have themselves an "artisanal" relationship with the good (see Bakker 2003). In her analysis of water privatization in the United Kingdom, Karen Bakker describes how a good such as water can be either an "artisanal" or an

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[38] The concept of a "quotidian" community is explained below.

[39] Jung (2003) makes a similar observation with respect to corn, and my language is lifted from hers. Jung writes that plummeting corn prices were "devastating" to Mexican peasants because "corn, and farming, is additionally at the center of the communal life, not just the livelihood, of Mexico's rural population" (p. 8). But the development of this insight is not her primary purpose and, as a result, goes understandably un-theorized.

"industrial" product. Where water is artisanal, people interact directly with its cultivation and distribution. The good does not simply arrive at an individual's home daily by opening a tap. Instead, it is "drawn from local streams, wells, or ponds, or delivered by water vendors in jerrycans or tanker trucks to the home" (ibid., p. 42). People need to exert daily effort specifically and consciously to procure enough water to meet their needs. In much of the global north, however, Bakker notes that water is an industrial product and "large amounts of [it] … are taken for granted as a necessary requirement for daily life in modern, industrialized societies" (ibid., p. 42). Water becomes an "abstract" industrial product (ibid., p. 46); consumers need only open a tap and the good miraculously appears.

As this discussion should make clear, any notion of subsistence resources is embedded in a social context. Local meanings and perceptions play an important role in how and whether any community understands a good as "subsistence"; material resources cannot be treated independently from the ideas with which they are imbued. Even a resource as objectively important to survival as water becomes subjectively politicized, generating protest in some instances and quiescence in others.

Just as they change over time, both the ideational and the material aspects of a subsistence good may differ from neighborhood to neighborhood, community to community, or between social or economic classes. But they may also bridge these divides, taking on similar meanings and material values in different communities at different times and, in doing so, providing common ground across geographic or social communities that may understand themselves to share little. Irrespective of whether similar or distinct meanings are at work, that these goods are imbued with meanings beyond their material value makes them a likely locus for widespread resistance when communities understand that access to them is threatened.

One potential danger to this approach is the temptation to identify these meaning-laden subsistence goods purely through post-hoc analysis; we would know that a subsistence resource indexed community in the ways proposed here when a threat to it produced widespread social mobilization. Retrospective accounts, however, are not the only way to identify staple goods that take on community-related meanings. Indeed, for the argument made here to hold, scholars would need to show that the good took on community-related meanings prior to any mobilization. Analysis of material produced before a social movement emerges can accomplish this goal by establishing the meanings with whichh the good was imbued before mobilization began. Secondary sources such as anthropological studies may be a good place to start. But primary sources including newspaper articles, school textbooks, novels, radio and television programs, movies, jokes, poetry, and songs, are critical in any effort to understand the meanings with which goods like corn, rice, or water are imbued prior to mobilization. Furthermore, analysis of the discourse and symbols deployed during the early stages of a mobilization should not be discounted. Any mobilization is likely to transform the meanings with which the grievance at stake is imbued, yet the language that leaders and participants use to mobilize others and describe their own actions also tells us something about semiotics prior to a movement. Movements may help to transform meanings, but they cannot do so overnight and early movement discourse is likely to tell us much about what both leaders and participants understand to be at stake.

Mechanisms

I propose that two interrelated processes help to generate broad-based protests when actors perceive markets as threats to accessing subsistence resources. The first is rooted in what is understood to be the good's material role—subsistence threats imply both high and widespread material costs of inaction. But purely material understandings of the threat cannot alone explain variation in social movement activity (recalling also that the material aspects of these goods cannot be fully separated from their meanings). I propose that the material aspect of a subsistence threat is a necessary condition for social mobilization in response to market driven subsistence threats, but it cannot account for timing or origins of most instances of social mobilization.

The second process at work is generated by the community-related meanings with which these goods are imbued. The material role of a subsistence good invests it with meanings that then make the material and the symbolic indistinguishable. As a physical foundation of livelihood, subsistence resources both construct and order community in the present and serve as the perfect vehicle through which identities can be projected through space and time. This happens in rural areas around the cultivation of crops or collection of water and in urban areas where daily routines might be structured around a trip to the *tortillería* or the mid-morning taco snack. As livelihood practices are repeated again and again, they can continue to index community even if the practices themselves are no longer necessary for physical survival.[40] As a result, threats to a subsistence resource can tap into imagined communities, such as national, regional, communal, ethnic, or class-based collective identifications, heightening solidarity through bringing to the fore common relationships with the threatened resource.[41]

Quotidian communities—relationships based on routine, face-to-face encounters— may also be understood to be at risk as market-based threats to subsistence goods may challenge established community routines and centers for social interaction. Quotidian communities can produce group identifications that are no less powerful than those produced by connections to nation or ethnic group. Members are people you know— they are faces you recognize even if you have never learned their names; they are people with whom you might have a ritual, performative interaction in which you haggle over a price or talk about the weather.[42] Here it is not simply about the routines themselves, but rather about what those routines have come to signify—perhaps independence, pride, or local community. A threat to subsistence might directly alter these regular practices, unsettling a particular *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1990) and creating a perceived threat to community in the process. A threat to tortillas might

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[40] This is not to imply that the practices become static. They change constantly.

[41] In his study of Old Regime Paris, Steven Kaplan (1996) offers an example of which the production and consumption of a staple grain can imbue it with community-related meanings. The baguette, Kaplan argues, serves as a "metonym for the nation and its civilization in France" (ibid., p. 3). For the French, he argues, "the loaf contained something more than calories and nutrients" (ibid., p. 23), conveying "social identity" (ibid., p. 46), and serving "at the core of both the material and symbolic organization of everyday existence" (ibid., p. 23). See Ferguson (1985); Comaroff and Comaroff (1990); Ohnuki-Tierney (1993); Moore (2000); Perreault (2001); and Perreault (2005) for additional examples of the ways in which subsistence goods take on community-related meanings.

[42] Kaplan describes how the routines between bakers and patrons in Old Regime Paris were often "ritualized and coded" (1996, p. 570). From these routines, he argues "grew the bonds of clientage, clientalism, and community" (ibid., p. 570).

disrupt the local relationships that develop around a *tortillería*, and a threat to water might disrupt the local management systems that have developed in places where the resource is particularly scarce. As a result, to threaten access to the resource is to threaten not only perceptions of region or nation, but also the relational fabric of local community.

The connections between meanings and emotions are critical to understanding both processes. Those for whom the costs of mobilization outweigh the potential material benefits might be available to the movement because of the emotions at play when they perceive communities to be at risk.[43] Perceived threats to nation, region, ethnic group, neighborhood, or family (to name just a few) can produce powerful emotional reactions—anger, solidarity, vulnerability, and pride all played critical roles in the Bolivian case explored below. These emotions may help us understand why a particular political moment is perceived as a political opportunity, why disparate groups understand themselves to be involved in a shared fate, or why a frame resonates. But it is not simply a story of why and how emotions work the way they do to generate and sustain processes of social mobilization. By understanding grievances as meaning-laden, we can better understand why particular grievances might generate the specific feeling states they do and why some categories of grievances might systematically produce feeling-states conducive to social mobilization.

Both the material and the ideational dynamics of the role of subsistence in daily life have implications for resource mobilization, political opportunities, and master frames, but it is the meaning of the subsistence resource itself that directly activates the other processes that work together to generate resistance. Evidence from the Bolivian water wars offers initial support for an approach that puts the meanings of grievances, and of subsistence grievances in particular, at the center of our causal analysis. The case analysis that follows does not formally test the theoretical approach proposed here but instead serves heuristic and exploratory purposes. I hope that other scholars will refine the model through additional case analysis.

Part III

The Bolivian water wars

In January 2000, thousands of Bolivians took to the streets to protest the privatization of the Cochabamban water supply. While Bolivians had voiced their opposition to economic policy shifts that began almost 15 years earlier, the protests in Cochabamba grew to an unprecedented scope and scale. The events leading up to the protests were as follows: the Bolivian government sold the right to the water of Bolivia's third largest city, Cochabamba, to a private firm in June 1999. The firm gained rights not only to Cochabamba's municipal water system but also to water collected through private and communal wells. By the time ownership was formally transferred 5 months later, a cross-class, cross-ethnic social movement demanding access to affordable water had taken hold in the region. In January when bills came due for water that had, in some cases, doubled in price, the water wars began, shutting down the city for days a time.

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[43] See D. B. Gould (2009) for an excellent discussion of emotions and social movements.

Protests spread throughout the country and the Bolivian government was forced to re-nationalize Cochabamban water by April.[44]

Attention to the community-related meanings with which water was imbued in the Cochabamban context explains three critical elements of the water movement's development.[45] (1) The broad-based nature of the initial alliance that came together to launch the movement; (2) the subsequent emergence of the Coordinator for the Defense of Water and Life—the main organizational force that drove the movement—and (3) the resonance of the national, regional, communal, and ethnic frames that cut across salient divisions and brought Cochabambans to the streets. All three played an indispensable role in the movement's origins and broad-based, widespread composition.[46]

CODAEP

Bolivia began to implement market reforms in 1985 with the New Economic Policy. Government policy makers reduced trade barriers, slashed public expenditures, devalued the currency, and privatized national industries.[47] The Policy generated significant opposition, but the President averted a general strike by imposing a state of siege (Klein 2003, p. 245). Reforms brought inflation under control and Bolivia began to enjoy impressive rates of economic growth. But the benefits of marketization were not evenly distributed. By 1998, the real urban minimum wage was only 37 %of what it had been in 1980; Bolivia's poor and middle class were not without material grievances yet there was little sustained or large-scale resistance to the implementation of market reforms.

It was clear from the start that the Cochabamba concession would meet with local opposition. Just after government officials signed the contract in June 1999, formal opposition began with the founding of the Committee for the Defense of Water and the Popular Economy (CODAEP), a group comprised largely of local professionals—engineers, economists, environmentalists, and architects. It is impossible to explain the emergence of CODAEP without engaging the role that water had played in Cochabamba's recent and extended history, and what it meant to Cochabamba's

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[44] Movement participants appear to have been unaware that a large, US based multinational firm, was a primary investor in Aguas del Tunari until well after the movement was underway. As a result, it is difficult to credit the foreign-ness the firm with any of the early participation. Accounts suggest that the connection between Bechtel and Aguas del Tunari was not revealed until March, 2000 (Finnegan 2002).

[45] Data on the Cochabamba case come from newspapers and other archives, written materials (letters, pamphlets, etc.) produced at the time of the water wars, and extensive interviews with movement leaders, participants, and opponents, as well as government officials. Fieldwork was conducted during the summer/fall of 2008 and winter of 2010.

[46] I am not proposing here that every movement leader or participant mentioned here or in the pages that follow was motivated either partially or entirely by the community-related meanings of water. A host of other factors was undoubtedly at work as both leaders and participants saw the moment through opportunistic lenses. For some it may have been a chance finally to fight the forces of neoliberalism, while for others it may have been a moment to demand increased regional autonomy; opportunism was not absent from the movement's dynamics. Yet these claims alone had been unable to motivate large-scale resistance. Water provided the grievance around which various interests could unite, even if, for some, water was understood to be a vehicle and not an end in itself.

[47] Electricity, oil and natural gas, telecommunications, and the national airlines were all privatized between 1985 and 1997. Rate increases, however, were relatively modest. Tariffs on private electricity consumption rose only 7 % during the first year of privatization in Cochabamba (1994–1995) and telephone tariffs suggest decreasing rates post-reform (Barja and Urquiola 2001).

professional sector in particular. While CODAEP's founders anticipated that rates would rise, most members would not have to make life-altering material trade-offs to pay their bills; members were largely comfortable middle-class Cochabamban professionals. Yet the central role that water had played in the region and the conception that privatization meant far more than potential rate hikes were similarly shared. The contract was understood as a betrayal of a long regional effort to secure and distribute a sustainable water supply. Water's meanings made CODAEP—a critical mobilizing structure in the movement's early stages—possible. Meanings not only made this particular resource available to the movement but were indispensable to its construction in the first place. CODAEP emerged, at least in part, because water signified community in a variety of ways to many members of Cochabamba's professional sector.

For nearly 50 years, Cochabamban engineers, architects, economists, environmentalists, and lawyers had been researching and advocating for various solutions to the region's limited access to water. The debates about Misicuni or Corani—two extensive construction projects proposed to help alleviate water shortages—had raged within the engineers' society and inside the Mayor's office for almost two decades; the Misicuni project attained almost mythical status as the foundation for the rebirth of Cochabamba. Communities commissioned studies on water table depth and debates took place over well construction. Studies about water loss and quality, as well as corruption within the municipal water organization made front-page news. And every year, as the dry season reached its final weeks, conversations revolved around water—how may days a week people were receiving it, how much sediment came in it, and whether they would make it until the rains without a massive shut down.

But the importance of water in the region is grounded in more than the recent history of drought. Even the name "Cochabamba" comes from a combination of the Quechua words for lake and plain. The name is a reflection of what made the Cochabamba valley such a popular place for early settlers—the combination of water and plains made for a particularly fertile region. Cochabamba's water served to help turn the region into the breadbasket of the country, fueling Bolivia's growth by providing grains to the miners that drove the country's development through both the silver and tin mining booms. Cochabambans speak of this role with great pride and nostalgia—the region's history of cultivation produces notions of regional self-worth and recollections of it are infused with national pride. Today, two of the region's mottos continue to be "Cochabamba, granary of Bolivia" and "Cochabamba, the garden city." The mottos evoke a sense of nostalgia and sorrow; they are notions of a paradise lost.

Every CODAEP founder interviewed for this research offered lengthy treatments of how water had been a constant reference in both personal and professional life. One engineer recalled, "we had been the bread basket of the country, of course water was central in our lives. When they published the [Aguas del Tunari] contract the Engineers' Society had to do an evaluation. And it was simply a bad project. After all these years, we deserved a better project" (interview with the author, 2010, Cochabamba). The contract evoked strong attachments to region—to what Cochabambans "deserved." The extended struggle for water made these conceptions of what the region "deserved" particularly powerful. While Cochabambans speak of themselves as the "breadbasket" of Bolivia in the past-tense—they clearly no longer envision they region as providing for the rest of the country—the language they use suggests that, because Cochabamba had used its water for so many years to fuel the country, it now "deserved" better where

water was concerned. For many of Cochabamba's professionals, water was part of regional identifications both with respect to a historically grounded pride in cultivation and recent efforts to overcome shortages. Many understood the Aguas del Tunari contract as an insult to the region perpetrated by officials in La Paz who had no respect or understanding for what the region "deserved."

The Coordinadora

The Coordinator for the Defense of Water and Life (the Coordinadora) served as the key organizational force in the water wars. Formed in mid-November, just after the final papers were signed allowing Aguas del Tunari to begin to operate the municipal water system in Cochabamba, the Coordinadora brought together Cochabambans from disparate classes, occupations, and locations. Rural peasant organizations cooperated with urban unions and the urban professionals who had formed CODAEP worked closely with neighborhood organizations from the city's poorest communities. The Coordinadora was, indeed, a "new" organization, and the mobilizing structure it helped to provide was critical to the movement's rapid growth. But the Coordinadora was built on strong existing organizations, each of which had weathered previous market reforms without being able to muster sustained opposition movements. The strength of the Coordinadora came from the willingness of a wide range of Cochabamba's already established organizations—from labor unions to peasants' organizations to urban professional societies—to work together. Attention to water's meanings explain why this unprecedented alliance was possible. Once again, we cannot understand the formation of a mobilizing structure critical to the movement's growth without understanding how water came to signify community to many Cochabambans.

One of the pre-existing organizations central to the Coordinadora's rise was the *regantes*' (irrigators') union. *Regantes* not only make a living controlling and conducting water to irrigate fields; they also develop spiritual and personal connections with the resource. The *usos y costumbres* (loosely translated as "traditions and customs") vary from valley to valley within the Department of Cochabamba. Some *regantes* speak to water as they might to livestock, or even a child—treating it "*como ser vivo*"—as a living thing—and often assigning it either a male or female gender depending on the circumstance. Some describe water as the "blood of the earth" in which the Wirakocha, the god responsible for the earth's creation, resides. *Regantes* routinely perform *k'oas*—a ritual to ask for the blessing of the Pachamama, or Mother Earth—as they change the flow of a particular stream or open an outlet from a lake. Many *regantes* understood the Aguas del Tunari contract to put these relationships—many rooted in imagined connections to a broadly Andean indigenous community—at risk. Water is more than simply a source of income or a component of physical nourishment for Cochabamban *regantes*; it serves as a connection to an immediate network that gives meaning to everyday life, as well as to a broader *regante* community, and a uniquely Andean past and present.

The *regantes* and CODAEP joined to mount a series of successful blockades in October and early November. The *regantes* then called a meeting to think about next steps. The meeting brought *regantes* and CODAEP together with the factory workers' union, the Departmental Worker's Union, the teachers' union, the transportation workers' union, the campesinos' union, local neighborhood organizations, and water

councils, and many others.[48] They founded the Coordinadora, creating a formal alliance that spanned not only the urban–rural divides that ran deep in Cochabamba, but also social and class boundaries. In working together these groups not only forged a new mobilizing structure for the region but also altered popular conceptions of the possibility for widespread social resistance. Attention to water's meanings help us understand the formation of alliances that, through their very existence, transformed a political moment into a political opportunity.

For many in attendance at the meeting during which the Coordinadora was formed, unity seemed like the obvious choice. One attendee recalled: "Before, we tried to resist the pension reform, but it was only us—just the workers. But water is everywhere. It belongs to everyone and no one…. It is part of our history, part of who we are, all of us in Cochabamba … it was like giving a piece of our territory away. So of course we came together" (interview with the author, 2008, Cochabamba). Like other interviews, these comments invoke a language of necessity. His words work to make a moment of political contingency seem like a moral imperative. There is no "of course" about what happened in Cochabamba in 1999 and 2000. But for many the unity was perceived as inevitable; no other path was imaginable.

Furthermore, as this language evidences, understandings of water for leaders and participants alike were not just about what water meant to "*me*" but rather about what water meant to "*us*." Movement leaders and participants revealed a notion of a shared understanding of water, speaking on behalf of fellow *regantes*, factory workers, neighbors, and Cochabambans, describing water as something that was important to "*us*." Water's historical and contemporary roles in the region combined, allowing water to be perceived as shared by groups as disparate as *regantes*, factory workers, and business owners. On January 11, Cochabambans took to the streets in response to the Coordinadora's call, mounting what they called the "blockade for dignity." The central government called in hundreds of police officers to control the march to the central Plaza and attempted to re-open the roads, but protesters stayed put.

Looking behind frame "resonance" in the water wars

Frames undoubtedly played a critical role in the rapid rise of CODAEP in and the subsequent emergence of the Coordinadora. The possibility for frames that built on connections to imagined and quotidian communities allowed movement leaders to broaden and to strengthen their appeal. Yet as this discussion has already begun to show, it was the community-related meanings with which water was imbued that explain why and how those frames resonated. The meanings that water had taken on in the region allowed movement leaders to build frames that resonated throughout Cochabamba, irrespective of social class or occupation. Local understandings of water that existed *prior* to movement activity created the conditions of possibility necessary for broadly resonate, potent master frames; it was not the frames that were doing the initial causal work. While appeals to both quotidian and imagined communities worked

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[48] The participation of the transportation union and the campesinos' union are particularly worthy of note. The transportation union had reportedly refrained from public protest for over 19 years (Cochabamba unida, rechaza reajuste de tarifas de agua. 1999. Opinión, December 23) and the campesinos' union had a history of poor relations with FEDECOR (Peredo et al. 2004, p.61). That both groups joined the Coordinadora offers further evidence of the water's coalition-building power.

in tandem throughout the movement, I highlight here a few of the ways in which imagined identifications—particularly to nation and ethnicity—came to the fore.

Conceptions of water as part of regional or national identity resonated strongly from the first CODAEP meetings. The quotation above from a CODAEP member and engineer appealing to what the region "deserved" echoes the sentiments of a variety of interviewees. But many also broadened their associations to include national claims. Maria Esther Udaeta, who later helped to negotiate agreements with the government in February, recalls that she felt as though to violate water "was to violate our sovereignty" (interview with the author, 2010, Cochabamba). Nelly Yañez, a member of the Women's Civic Committee and self-defined member of to Cochabamban upper-middle class, says that she participated in the water wars because "water is *patria*"; to sell it or make it unaffordable for anyone was simply a "violation of the *patria*" (interview with the author, 2010, Cochabamba).

Throughout the protests, Cochabambans marched behind the Bolivian flag and images of it held in the air dot photographs of the events. Banners made with the colors of the Bolivian flag literally separated marchers from the police sent in from La Paz to confront them. For some, protesters took the plaza "in the name of Bolivia.… The state forfeits the flag when they don't do their job. The people raised the flag because they were defending the country" (interview with the author, 2010, Cochabamba). The protesters claimed and cloaked themselves in national symbols, leaving those who sought to thwart the marches as somehow outside of the nation. The Aguas del Tunari contract clearly meant far more than simply increased water rates. It was an affront to national pride and conceptions of national sovereignty.

Importantly, the perceived threat to water tapped into not only national, but also clearly ethnic identifications. The indigenous *wiphala* appeared almost as frequently on the streets as the Bolivian flag. Labor leader Walter Antezana's recollections echo those of other participants. Both the Bolivian flag and the *wiphala*, he recalls, "brought more energy to the streets. They reminded us what was at stake, what we were fighting for" (interview with the author, 2008, Cochabamba). The *usos y costumbres* that many understood to be at risk were not simply the physical practices of rural water irrigation. To protect *usos y costumbres* was also to preserve an imagined notion of a communal connection to an Andean past. *Usos y costumbres* provide an easy way to capture conceptually, essentialize, and preserve "*lo andino*"—an idealized "Andean" way of life that is part of what, for many Cochabambans, it has come to mean to be Cochabamban. With water as the organizing threat, indigenous, regional, and national imaginings are easily entwined. One protester recalled "I was Quechua, Bolivian, Cochabamban—I was everything during those days. Water belonged to all of us" (interview with the author 2008, Cochabamba). The Bolivian nation did not challenge or come into conflict with indigenous claims. Instead the two worked together to reinforce and support one another.

To defend water was to defend the country, the region, and cultural practice. Nationalist and ethnic imaginings came together, in addition to associations with region, alongside one another without conflict. While previous fiscal and monetary reforms took a significant and immediate toll on the livelihood of the poor,[49] few could

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[49] This article does not take a position on the long run outcome of neoliberal reforms on economic growth. It is not controversial, however, to assert that many of them had immediate negative consequences for Bolivia's poor. Whether the reforms will prove to have been a "good" decision for economic growth is heavily contested.

be framed in such starkly nationalist, regional, *and* ethnic terms. The movement slogan, "¡El agua es nuestra, carajo!" ("The water is ours, damn it!") had a broad, inclusive appeal. "Ours" simultaneously referred to Bolivian, Cochabamban, and "Andean" (or indigenous) conceptions of ownership of, or rights to, Cochabamba's water. The slogan itself called a broad "we" into being, but that "we" was only possible because of the ways in which water took on meaning for a variety of Cochabambans. Water could be described as belonging to Bolivians, as a particular right of Cochabambans, or a reflection of Andean customs in ways that cuts in teachers' salaries or decreased provision of social services could not. Water had tapped into powerful imagined communities that were, for this moment, able to bring people to the streets and to exist together largely without conflict. These frames, while deployed adeptly by movement leaders, were only possible because of the meanings with which water was imbued.

Throughout the January protests, Cochabambans appeared as a single group in the streets, their connection to country, region, and local community heightened by the perception of a shared threat. Understandings of water had helped to constitute collective actors capable of mobilization. Regardless of the kinds of challenges individual Cochabambans faced as they sought to access water daily, or the personal or spiritual connections they claimed with the good, for many, the Aguas del Tunari contract was understood as a threat to the collective. Movement slogans like "*nosotros somos la Coordinadora* [we are the Coordinadora]," "*El agua es del Pueblo* [the water is of/belongs to the people/town/community," "*El Pueblo decide y no necesita ordenes* [the people/town/community decides and doesn't need orders]" and "*El agua es nuestra ¡Carajo*! [The water is ours, damnit!]*" summoned a collective "we" into being in the very moments in which they were uttered or written. Cochabambans became a group in the streets, brought together as members of a *pueblo*, as members of the Coordinadora, as part of a "*nuestra* [ours]" to which they all could collectively belong. During the final days of protest in April, graffiti had crossed out "Aguas del Tunari" on a company sign and replaced it with "Aguas del Pueblo."

On January 13, at the end of the third day of protests, government representatives and movement leaders sat down to negotiate. While there was much more to come, the water wars had undoubtedly begun. It is hard to explain why Cochabamba erupted when it did without specific attention to the mobilizing power of the meanings with which water was imbued. Cochabambans took to the streets because many understood far more to be at stake than simply their material relationship with water—local communities and regional, national, and ethnic identifications were perceived to be at risk. While other dynamics took hold as they took to the streets again in February and April, what water meant to Cochabambans explains why they came together to form a movement in late 1999 and early 2000.

Conclusions

The analysis developed here proposes an amendment to social movement theory—one that adds a thorough examination of grievances and what they mean to any study of contentious politics. Grievances are not the only part of the story—attention to political opportunities, resources, and frames offers insights critical to scholarship—yet their systematic inclusion in causal analysis can refine our understandings of particular

events while enabling meaningful comparisons. I make the case that scholars should incorporate the categorization of grievances—grounded in the meanings they take on—as an additional element in social movement theories.

By treating grievances as meaning-laden, we can better understand how and why other dimensions of the political process model are activated. When we incorporate the meanings a grievance takes on into our analysis of political opportunities we might be able to understand better why apparently closed opportunity structures nevertheless sometimes leave room for large-scale mobilization. Indeed, by understanding the meanings with which grievances are imbued, we might more fully acknowledge the constructed nature of a political opportunity in the first place. As Gould (2009) (among others) reminds us, political opportunities are only opportunities because actors on the ground understand them as such. When we understand the ways in which water worked to symbolize community in Cochabamba, we can see how, even in the absence of apparent openings in political opportunity structures, the movement helped to construct a new political climate. A threat to water was an opportunity for local activists not because it unsettled elite dynamics or political alignments but rather because it signified community to many Cochabambans regardless of where they lived or worked or where their political allegiances lay. We can understand how water helped to create an opportunity only when we embed it in the Cochabamban context and take into account the ways in which it had come to signify region, nation, local pride, and dignity. The evidence suggests that certain categories of grievances might enable actors to construct political opportunities more easily than others.

Similarly, attention to water's meanings help us understand why the mobilizing structures that were central to the water wars came together to mount a large-scale movement in this case when they had been largely unable to do so around other grievances. Water cut across traditional regional cleavages, indexing community to rural irrigators, urban factory workers, peri-urban poor, and middle-class professionals. By understanding what water meant in a local context we can explain why, for example, professional sector associations, the transportation union, and neighborhood associations in Cochabamba's poor southern communities understood themselves as having a shared concern. A variety of resources throughout Cochabamba were available to the water movement in a way that they had not been during the process of privatizing pensions. When we look to water's meanings, we can better explain the broad-based coalition that came together in Cochabamba in the fall of 1999 and winter of 2000.

Furthermore, certain categories of grievances might help to bring potentially mobilizing identifications to the fore. Those categories of grievances that tap into pre-existing imagined or quotidian identifications might be more mobilizing than others. Threats to subsistence resources are not the only potential sources of perceived threats to community. One need only think about the mobilizing power of appeals to religious communities (certainly both imagined and quotidian) to think of the ways in which mobilizing structures might be available to a movement when people perceive those communities to be threatened. But we can only understand which mobilizing structures might support which movements when we understand the meanings that grievances take on.

The example offered here focuses on theorizing subsistence grievances and the case offered centers on water, in particular. While water may be unique in its essential qualities (its necessary role in survival is difficult to dispute and does not vary across

place or time), it is also understood differently depending on the context. Where water has not taken on the community-related meanings evidenced in the Cochabamba case, we might not expect social mobilization to occur, even in the face of steep price increases. Cursory evidence from Tucumán, Argentina also appears to support the argument. In the first year after the 1995 privatization, tariffs were set to increase 95 %. Reports after the concession began put average increases closer to 104 % (Strauss-Kahn and Casanova 2005; Giarracca 2006). The increase in Tucumán was higher than the average increase in Cochabamba but similar to some of the extreme cases often cited by activists. The percentage of the daily minimum wage that went towards water bills was also comparable across the Tucumán and Cochabamba cases. In Cochabamba, average rates went from 5 % of the daily minimum wage to 11 %. The same figures in Tucumán jumped from 6 to 14 %. Yet the increase does not appear to have sparked mobilizations. Sustained resistance only emerged over a year after the first water bills were due when the water that arrived in residents' homes was consistently brownish in color. The case suggests that I am not remiss in studying water as a resource that, despite its nutritional importance, varies in the meanings with which it is (or is not) imbued.[50]

Furthermore, comparison of the events in Cochabamba to moments when a different subsistence resource was at stake suggests that theory can, indeed, be applied to subsistence resources generally instead of to water specifically. Ethnographic analysis reveals that the mechanisms explored here shed light on recent mobilizing around corn in Mexico[51] and, in addition to the examples drawn from scholarship at the beginning of this article, initial research suggests it may provide insights into cases as diverse as the Indian Salt March of 1930, Egyptian bread riots in 1977,[52] and Japanese organizing to protect native rice in the 1990s.

While this article explores the implications of a focus on subsistence, the broader claim is that there are likely to be other categories of grievances that can be similarly theorized. Perhaps systematic attention to moments or types of government repression will yield comparable insights. One can imagine that when the *guanacos* (water canons) that were infamous mechanisms of control under Pinochet appeared on the streets in Chile in response to recent student protests they evoked powerful memories of repression. The same canons on the streets in the United States would likely conjure very different recollections and thus work differently to (de) mobilize a movement. Recent mobilizations in Brazil apparently sparked by increases in public transportation costs suggest an additional potential category. Are there meanings that access to public transport takes on in some times and places, perhaps indicating the promise of upward social mobility or even a literalizing of the geographical divides created by income inequality, that make it a grievance that is particularly likely to spark mobilizations when threatened? The key to future research in this vein is to pay attention to the

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[50] Evidence from London's experience in 1989, when water privatization led to significant rate increases but organization to oppose the measure was limited (Bakker 2001), also appears to support the argument but price increases were not as dramatic. Water prices rose almost 30 % in the first 5 years of privatization (Saal and Parker 2000) but there was little mobilized opposition.

[51] See Simmons (2012).

[52] I have not attempted to theorize riots in this piece, and the mechanisms at work in a riot are likely to work differently from those proposed here. Yet a theoretical commitment to understanding grievances as meaning-laden suggests that further attention to subsistence riots would hone our understandings of the relationships between grievances and patterns of contention.

meanings these grievances take on in the particular times and places in which they emerge.

Additionally, it seems obvious to state that electoral irregularities will be understood differently in different contexts. One could imagine that systematic analysis of the times and places in which electoral fraud has prompted widespread resistance, and the moments it has not, could produce broadly applicable theories. Perhaps an understanding of what elections have come to mean can help us explain why, in some cases, electoral fraud leads to widespread unrest while in others we see little or no social response. Yet social scientists can, and often do, code electoral fraud similarly, and come to general conclusions as a result.[53] The implication of the theory developed here is that this kind of analysis misses the variation in the grievance produced by the meanings it takes on. An understanding of what elections *mean* will help scholars better explain and predict when their violation is likely to create opposition. When we understand grievances as meaning-laden, we may shed light on the mechanisms at work in how opportunities emerge, resources are built, and frames become available. Grievances can be a "moving part" that helps to explain social movement emergence.

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[53] Joshua Tucker's analysis (2007) both supports my claim that the systematic study of electoral fraud should yield generalizable results and treats all electoral fraud as if it might have the same results. In fact, his argument, grounded in a rational choice framework, suggests that electoral fraud should take on the same meaning across time and place, as long as citizens have "serious grievances against their government" (p. 537). Almeida (2003) also suggests that he understands fraudulent elections to function similarly across place and time when he states that fraudulent elections can serve as a particularly powerful motivator for threat-induced collective action (p. 353).

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