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Social movements, welfare and social policy: a critical analysis

Abstract
This article proposes that theories of 'new' social movements (NSMs) may illuminate contemporary welfare struggles and inform research into collective action in social policy. NSM theory is relevant because it focuses on social movement cultures, identity politics and symbolic struggles for the recognition of difference. However, it does this to the exclusion of 'traditional' issues such as material redistribution and inequality. A critical social policy, on the other hand, has retained a regard for these issues, but is also concerned with struggles for recognition. It is argued that all social movements raise issues about redistribution and recognition, although these will coexist to varying degrees. Using work carried out in the United States into women's self-help movements, this article shows how movements that are largely cultural may change social policy by posing symbolic challenges.

Key words: new politics of welfare, new social movement theory, post-Fordism, postmodernity

Introduction

In social policy, there has long been a recognition that social movements have been important in policy formation, yet there is a poverty of theory relating to social movements and little space has been given to generating concepts that might help us understand the role of movements in social policy and welfare. Alternatively, theorizing has been quite tentative as there appears not to be the analytical tools to make sense of collective action (Harrison, 1993/4: 30ff.).

One exception is Charles's (2000) recent analysis of the way in which feminist social movements have pressed the state to change

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social policy. However, while Charles (2000: 68) does acknowledge the cultural and social effects of movements, the focus in her study is on the political impact of social movements. Often regarded as an unintended consequence of collective action (Giugni, 1999), it is a central task of this article to show how the cultural and symbolic challenges of social movements may lead to policy change. Indeed, there is a burgeoning body of work, spanning sociology and social policy, which examines this. For example, della Porta (1999) argues that the transformation of public discourse on the right to protest in Italy and Germany was the result of a symbolic struggle between protesters and authorities (cf. Ellison and Martin, 2000). A similar argument has been proposed in social policy whereby scholars are asked to recognize not only material conditions and structural inequalities, but also the 'welfare discourses' and discursive regulation surrounding welfare subjects that have a direct effect on policy implementation (Taylor, 1998).

Since the 1960s, it is believed that 'new' social movements (NSMs) have emerged which operate primarily at the symbolic level and in the cultural networks constituting everyday life. However, while NSM theorists have some interest in the policy outcomes of social movements and in the changing nature of the relationship between movements and the welfare state, in social policy circles their theories are regarded as either too abstract (Charles, 2000: 39) or ill-considered (Hewitt, 1996: 200). Nevertheless, it is suggested in this article that some aspects of the NSM perspective might be deployed fruitfully when looking at welfare struggles.

NSM theory, however, has mixed blessings for analysing such conflicts. On the one hand, theorists have been able to transcend traditional categories by adopting postmodern ways of thinking. On the other hand, their ideas are based on a crude post-materialism which has caused them to abandon a concern for 'traditional' issues such as material redistribution and structural inequality. Critical social policy scholars, such as Fiona Williams, have adopted post-modern thought *and* retained a concern for these issues, thereby resolving what has been termed the redistribution–recognition dilemma (Fraser, 1995: 69). It is argued here that this integrated approach provides a better way of looking at contemporary movements that frequently combine, albeit to varying degrees, identity politics with social policy goals.

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There is now a plethora of work devoted to the study of social movements and it can be divided into several specialist areas (see della Porta and Diani, 1999). However, much of the research relating to policy has focused on the impact of movements by relating their action to changes in legislation or to some other indicator of policy change. Thus, most empirical work has tended to an assessment of the impact of anti-nuclear campaigns that is easily measured through declining nuclear energy production (Giugni, 1999: xxii). This is one reason why prima facie political process approaches and 'resource mobilization theory' seem most relevant to study the link between social movements and policy change because both perspectives are concerned with the normalization—through political organizations and structures—of previously excluded demands. While Scott (1990: 10) believes this to be the telos of movement activity, he argues that these approaches fail to account for the sources of solidarity that are the pre-conditions for purposive collective action and also neglect the macro-structural level of analysis.

These approaches also suffer from a 'myopia of the visible' (Melucci, 1989: 44) because they focus exclusively on the observable and measurable 'public' face of social movements. Furthermore, Melucci (1984: 822) argues that they are politically reductivist since they do not take seriously the cultural dimensions of social movements which are submerged in daily life. Verta Taylor's arguments regarding women's self-help around postpartum depression in the United States resemble Melucci's, although she sees this preoccupation with the public arena as part of the gendering of social movement theory whereby a male-dominated field has ignored the private or quotidian sphere that is the traditional locus of women's protest (Taylor, 1999: 26). Towards the end of this article a look is taken at Taylor's work, which is significant because it shows how movements that are principally cultural and pose symbolic challenges have transformed institutional practices and considers how they might change social policy. This is an important case because it demonstrates the efficacy of movements that have a 'feminine logic', or are less instrumental than they are 'internally oriented [. . .] following an identity logic of action' (Taylor, 1999: 10).[1]

It is argued that this approach may prove a useful way of looking at contemporary struggles around welfare that have as much to do with issues of culture and identity as they do with redistribution. However, this means that we need to move away from the 'social

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administration' tradition in social policy (Taylor, 1998: 330) and towards a more inclusive view of welfare (but one that does not lose sight of people's material needs). We thus require an approach that sees an active role for the various organizations and groups that constitute the 'third sector' between profit-based private enterprise and the state (e.g., NGOs and voluntary organizations), as well as the multitude of campaigning and grassroots groups that make specific claims about welfare provision (e.g., self-help groups and support networks). To do this would seem important given the current political climate and the drive in social policy towards greater participation and user involvement in service provision (Croft and Beresford, 1989, 1992; Ward and Mullender, 1991).

New social movement theory

NSM theory developed in Europe and is premised on a number of key ideas. First, it is perceived that a 'crisis of Marxism' arose out of the development of welfare capitalism whereby the labour movement was seen to have compromised its revolutionary goals by being co-opted into the Keynesian state infrastructure (through trade unionism, for instance). Related to this is a second point. For those of a more optimistic persuasion this was seen as a major achievement of the labour movement as it extended citizenship rights, opened up avenues for political participation and increased economic security.

Third, it is believed that we have witnessed a 'silent revolution' in Western societies that has given rise to social movements that articulate what Inglehart (1977) has termed 'post-material' values. These movements build upon the accomplishments of past movements (i.e., the labour movement) yet are no longer concerned with 'old' issues such as material well-being and political inclusion, but are of a cultural nature and oriented about struggles over the meaning and quality of life. Thus, 'affluence [has] made it feasible to stop worrying about the old economic issues and take up these new concerns' (Calhoun, 1995: 187).

Fourth, NSMs mount a defence against what Habermas (1987) refers to as the colonization of the life-world (Adam, 1993: 321). They emerge to resist or stave off the gradual encroachment of bureaucratic systems into everyday life. Habermas shows, for instance, how clients'

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relation to public services is being restructured according to the participatory model of self-help organizations which should produce an informal sector that is not geared towards profit and will counter the party system with new forms of democracy and expressive politics (Habermas, 1981: 36–7). Moreover, conflicts in advanced Western societies now deviate from the welfare state pattern of institutionalized conflict over distribution. They are no longer a matter of material reproduction and are not channelled through political parties or integrated into the system. Instead, they operate on new sites and are manifest in extra-institutional forms of protest:

> The question is not one of compensations that the welfare state can provide. Rather, the question is how to defend or reinstate endangered life styles, or how to put reformed life styles into practice. In short, the new conflicts are not sparked off by *problems of distribution*, but concern the *grammar of forms of life*.
>
> (Habermas, 1981: 33; emphasis in original)

Touraine (1981), too, builds his theory of NSMs on a version of inner colonization as does his former student, Alberto Melucci. However, unlike Touraine, Melucci (1989: 80) does not wish to discover *the* central movement of post-industrial society. He argues also that NSMs are identity-based rather than class-based. Consequently, they are not made up of an homogeneous group of people who share the same social location. Rather, they are heterogeneous and consist of a plurality of meanings and orientations. The challenge for Melucci is *how* social movements achieve unity in the face of this diversity, but he is also concerned with *why* NSMs have emerged in Western societies.

Melucci believes that we now live in a 'complex society' where material production is replaced increasingly by the production of signs, symbols and social relations. Contemporary social movements are correspondingly heterogeneous, fragile and complex (Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992: 142). Moreover, they pose symbolic challenges to the homogenizing logic of the system. Movement actors do this by living out alternative lifestyles and thereby ask us to recognize and accept their right to be different. As power is increasingly masked by operational codes, formal rules and bureaucratic procedures, contemporary movements 'act as "revealers" by exposing that which is hidden or excluded by the decision-making process' (Melucci, 1989: 175).

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It is through their culture or organizational form that social movements communicate the possibility of difference and it is for this reason that building a collective identity is so important as it enables them to deliver a coherent message. This is no mean feat and so Melucci has adopted a constructivist approach which analyses the processes involved in collective identity formation (Melucci, 1995). He believes that the conflicts and tensions inherent in social movements will only be resolved, and a collective identity built, if the individuals and groups that constitute them interact with one another in order to solve these problems.

A final key area of concern for Melucci, as well as for others with an interest in social movements, relates to the concept of autonomy. Giddens (1991: 155) argues that movements must always connect to 'institutionally immanent possibilities' or have some recourse to the wider political system. While this is so for Melucci, he says that the demands of contemporary movements also 'exist beyond political mediation and independently of its results' (Melucci, 1996: 216). He proclaims that the democratization of everyday life is signalled by the recognition and acceptance of difference through the establishment of autonomous social movements:

> A new political space is designed beyond the traditional distinction between state and 'civil society': an intermediate *public space*, whose function is not to institutionalise the movements nor to transform them into parties, but to make society hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making, while the movements maintain their autonomy.
>
> (Melucci, 1985: 815; emphasis in original)

There are clear similarities between the work of Melucci and Habermas here. Indeed, Melucci, like Habermas, also concerns himself with the relationship between social movements and the welfare state. He believes that overintrusive state intervention may trigger off either a defensive reaction or an action denouncing deficiencies in the welfare system, or a combination of the two. Thus, where public welfare policies are regarded as being both deficient *and* intrusive a resistant form of communitarianism may emerge that increases opportunities for participation, allows people to express their membership of and sense of belonging to a civil community, and is designed to offset the shortcomings of the welfare system (Melucci, 1996: 168–9).

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Criticisms of new social movement theory

Before showing how some aspects of NSM theory are apposite to current debates about welfare and social policy two major criticisms are set out, both of which will be relevant to this discussion. The first relates to what Steinmetz (1994: 179) has identified as the small academic cottage industry that has grown up around the project of proving that NSMs are not really new.

Employing historical analyses, these social scientists provide examples of past movements that resemble 'new' movements. Calhoun (1994: 22–4) argues that it is fallacious to talk of the women's movement as a NSM because it has a long and deep-rooted history. Moreover, he claims that the novel features of NSMs are features of *all* movements in their nascent period (Calhoun, 1995: 174). Thus, before they undergo institutionalization, incorporation and so on all movements have radical grassroots organization and appear distrustful of established political actors. Calhoun (1995: 179) also shows how the 19th and early 20th century working-class movement was more multidimensional than NSM theorists such as Melucci care to acknowledge.

Second, analysts have argued that some contemporary movements seem more 'old' than they do 'new'. In other words, they are not so much concerned with post-material struggles over quality of life as with 'traditional' issues such as material distribution, political opposition and citizenship rights. Shakespeare (1993: 258–9) has argued that the disability movement is one such movement that is still concerned with liberation rather than with post-material values. He shows how, along with women and black people, disabled people are concerned with the *continuing* inequalities that exist in access to political and economic power (cf. Fagan and Lee, 1997: 158).

Importantly, a variety of movements have sprung up as a reaction to the economic and social restructuring processes that emerged in the wake of the crisis of post-war growth. For these movement actors, quality of life has not so much to do with noise pollution and traffic congestion as with survival (Mayer, 1991). Consequently, they 'reflect and develop their collective identity around unemployment, homelessness or similar newly relevant survival issues' (Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992: 150). Research must therefore look at this section of the contemporary movement scene along with the more 'privileged' sector

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to which NSM theorists tend to confine their analyses, even though, in reality, movements often blend quality of life issues with what are perceived to be more traditional issues. These arguments are nonetheless important for a discussion of welfare because they stress material conditions and inequality which are concerns social policy continues to hold on to. It is worth examining them in greater depth therefore.

Critics of NSM theory who expound the foregoing view argue that we are now witnessing a shift from Fordism to post-Fordism (see Buechler, 2000).[2] Although post-Fordism has a number of variants (Bagguley, 1991), scholars working within the field of social movements usually derive from the 'regulation school'. This is because movements are believed to play a role in both the transformation and regulation of the social system. Regulation theory stipulates that each historical bloc comprises two essential elements: a regime of accumulation and a mode of regulation. The first refers to the way in which capital is accumulated and the second relates to the various institutional forms, social relations and forces necessary to secure this. For instance, under Fordism, the state intervened to enforce the technical conditions of profitable production and to meet the 'social prerequisites' for capitalist production such as workers' skills and family structures. A Keynesian form of the state was thus 'a necessary counterpart of the Fordist form of intensive accumulation' (Hirsch, 1988: 48).

It is argued that a 'crisis of Fordism' has occurred and that a new regime of accumulation is emerging, some of the principal features of which include: intensifying international competition; globalization; increased flexibility and casualization of labour; an ever more polarized workforce (and out-of-workforce); and fiscal crises and retrenchment. Many Western governments responded to this situation by adopting a neo-liberal stance. Critically, though, monetarist policies designed to 'streamline' the welfare state actually reversed many of the labour movement's earlier achievements (Turner, 1986: 104–5). This has meant that a growing number of 'marginalised groups are no longer socially incorporated in the traditional (i.e., welfare state) ways' (Mayer, 1991: 109). What relevance, then, does post-Fordism have for social policy and, more importantly, what role might social movements now play in welfare?

Like the political economy of welfare approach, post-Fordism is seen not to be sensitive to welfare as it proffers an unreconstructed

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account (see Williams, 1989). In other words, it overemphasizes capital accumulation, focuses exclusively on social class and ignores other social relations, such as gender and 'race', that constituted vital elements in the construction of Fordism and are now equally important as we move towards a post-Fordist welfare state (Williams, 1994; Carter and Rayner, 1996). However, of the post-Fordist explanations, regulation theory is best positioned vis-a-vis the role of welfare because it provides an holistic account of change which sets out the relationships between economic accumulation, the state and social formations (Carter and Rayner, 1996: 350–1; Penna and O'Brien, 1996: 47). In this way, it is able to consider not only the part that social movements might play in generating a new mode of regulation, but also what shape welfare may take. It is also capable of examining the contribution made by social movements to welfare and social policy albeit that this would, in the final analysis, be limited to servicing the needs of capital.

One problem that derives from the economic determinism inherent in regulation theory relates to its functionalism and the teleology that bedevils this form of explanation. It would seem therefore that social movements inevitably become incorporated or normalized into a mode of regulation. Thus, there appears no room for the autonomous movements that Melucci and Habermas speak of. A possible solution to this problem comes from within the regulation school itself. Mayer and Roth (1995: 311) point to the contradictory nature of NSMs, showing how in highlighting the costs of Fordism they also contributed to its crisis. However, they do not think the activity of these movements will end in their mere incorporation. Rather, future analyses must focus on movements' ambivalent development, showing how they challenge as well as contribute to new forms of regulation and a new regime of accumulation (Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992: 157; Mayer and Roth, 1995: 314). Research from Germany shows how the crisis of the bureaucratic welfare state, which necessitates a more flexible approach to welfare provision, has led local governments to draw upon the innovations of NSMs by, for instance, co-opting self-help programmes and workers' collectives (Mayer, 1991: 121; Mayer and Roth, 1995: 312).

These issues are important to the argument in this article that social movement analysts must not focus exclusively on collective identity, symbolic challenges and post-material values and ignore issues relating to material redistribution, structural inequality and so

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forth. Post-Fordist approaches are not able to deal adequately with the former and, since many contemporary welfare struggles are about both redistribution and recognition, we need an approach that accommodates the two. Before exploring this issue, a brief look is taken at how the study of social movements, and especially how NSM theory, has been represented in social policy.

Social movements in social policy

As was said in the introduction, social movement theories have recently attracted the attention of some in social policy. Hewitt (1996), for instance, appears to agree with other critics of NSM theory when he says that despite the existence of diverse cultural forms, empirical research suggests the presence of universal needs and the essentially material nature of humankind. Langan (1998), though, regards NSMs, and especially self-help organizations, as part of a wide-ranging radical critique that emerged in the 1970s around the welfare's state incapacity to provide for the growing needs of a diverse society. She argues that the most coherent and comprehensive challenge came from the women's movement which:

> [D]emanded extensive reforms to make welfare services more responsive to women's needs [. . .] These forces challenged the welfare state as reproducing the forms of inequality and oppression of the wider society. They exposed the universalist propositions of welfare provision as incapable of meeting the needs of *different* social groups. From a proposition that recognised inequalities among groups, activists from these movements identified the welfare provision as having a key role in replicating disadvantage and discrimination.
>
> (Langan, 1998: 15; emphasis in original)

Notwithstanding the role of the women's movement, recently the disability movement has attracted most attention (see Priestley, 1999: ch. 3) and is frequently referred to as a NSM. This characterization seems to have originated in the work of Oliver (1990) who regards it as a NSM because it is internationalist; aims at empowerment and consciousness raising and offers a critical evaluation of society; and is located on the periphery of the political system. Crucially, he argues that the movement is also post-materialist because it is concerned with the quality of life of disabled people. However, he goes on to say that issues of material deprivation and social disadvantage, which are

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still pertinent to many disabled people, are also central to the movement (Oliver, 1990: 122). In this respect, Oliver seems to concur with Shakespeare who is himself not utterly averse to conceiving of the disability movement as a NSM. Shakespeare shows how some of the features of NSMs can also be found in the disability movement; ideas about autonomy and independent living, for instance (Shakespeare, 1993: 261).

In a more recent account, Hughes (1998) also discusses the disability movement as a NSM, but his portrayal seems quite unlike the NSMs that are studied by Melucci and others. Hughes argues that disabled people are 'socially, politically and legally oppressed' and are involved in 'concrete struggles both to change the law and use law to overcome discrimination in areas of social policy, such as employment, welfare rights and housing' (Hughes, 1998: 80). This appears not to fit the idea of NSMs that are involved in post-material struggles and symbolic challenges, and that eschew traditional politics and other conventional forms of interest intermediation.

It appears that the disability movement contains a complex mix of traditional and novel elements. However, there also seems to be some confusion within disability studies regarding the nature of NSMs and debates surrounding their 'newness'. An exception to this is the work of Fagan and Lee (1997) who use the case of the disability movement to show the relevance of NSM theory in particular to social policy.

Although Fagan and Lee overlook this, it is not hard to see how the profuse fragmentation and diversity that they see as characteristic of the movement could be examined using Melucci's constructivist framework, as the formation of a collective identity will enable a movement *of* disabled people to become autonomous and have a common voice. However, it is also clear that the disability movement has distinctly 'old' characteristics. Fagan and Lee show how, while a change in consciousness is needed to overcome deep institutional discrimination against disabled people, the movement's concern with anti-discrimination legislation suggests that it is also 'the latest manifestation of a very old social movement aimed at securing an equal opportunity for all to participate fully in society through their status as equal citizens' (Fagan and Lee, 1997: 160).

Fagan and Lee's work also represents a more general attempt to connect NSM theory with the development of a critical social policy. Recent radical scholarship has shown how the policies formed on the back of the successes of the labour movement created a 'false uni-

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versalism' as they were 'built on a white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual norm' (Williams, 1992: 206). They thus militated against the interests of women, various ethnic groups, disabled people, and lesbians and gay men. Fagan and Lee propose, therefore, that to understand the part NSMs might play in policy formation it is necessary to consider the role that the politics of advocacy plays in contemporary welfare struggles.

A critical social policy has emerged to consider just how a 'voice' might be given to those on society's margins or regarded as other. Postmodernist ideas (also adopted by NSM theorists) about identity, diversity and difference are integral to this project. However, critical scholars also retain a concern for structural inequalities and the redistribution of material resources (Taylor, 1998). While the discipline of social policy has been shaken by postmodern thinking (Taylor-Gooby, 1994; Hillyard and Watson, 1996; Penna and O'Brien, 1996; Mann, 1998), a critical social policy is now able to fuse the issues that are central to NSM theory with those that are the traditional focus of social policy.

Thus, Fagan and Lee show how 'new welfare movements' are concerned with resource allocation, but also pose important questions about how resources are to be distributed fairly to a diverse set of groups. These movements, then, could be regarded as 'new' because they are oriented to different lifestyles and identities but are 'old' since they have still to do with traditional concerns over material distribution. Above all they are 'new' because they 'provoke *in a heightened form* questions that are central to the development of a critical social policy and the role of NSMs therein' (Fagan and Lee, 1997: 148; author's emphasis).

By combining postmodern ways of thinking with an ongoing concern for material distribution and structural inequality, a critical social policy has the best of both worlds. NSM theorists, on the other hand, appear to have little regard for inequality and the material conditions of people's existence, being more interested in the cultural and symbolic realms of society. It is only the post-Fordist critique that serves to temper this, albeit that this suffers the converse problem of economic reductionism (Bagguley, 1992: 28; Williams, 1994: 56). The discussion now moves to an area of social policy wherein scholars have attempted to heed marginalized voices in order to develop a new and dynamic approach to welfare.

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A new politics of welfare

While others in social policy have grappled with the issues discussed here (Hewitt, 1996; Taylor, 1998), it is probably Fiona Williams who has gone furthest in providing an account of welfare and social policy that includes a central role for social movements. Indeed, it is her argument that social movements have been instrumental in bringing about changes in welfare provision through, for instance, self-help and consumer-led groups which challenge the old welfare order. They have thus contributed to the emergence of the active welfare subject as opposed to the passive recipient of benefit (Williams, 1999: 683). She also acknowledges that wider social, economic and political transformations, such as post-Fordism and postmodernity, have had a direct effect upon welfare which, in turn, is becoming subject to patterns of fragmentation, change and uncertainty as well as complexity and contradiction (Williams, 1992). Williams accepts that postmodern thinking appears antithetical to the traditional subject-matter of social policy that focuses on material conditions, the inequalities that these produce and collective forms of provision to meet need (Williams, 1992: 208). Yet, despite the apparent mismatch between postmodernism and social policy, Williams integrates them successfully in her work.

She distinguishes traditional 'top-down' approaches to provision from the 'bottom-up' approaches articulated by user movements that emphasize diversity but, at the same time, seek to resist inequalities. For Williams, using the notion of 'diversity' enables us to see people as defining, determining and expressing their own needs. However, it is essential we recognize too that diversity is structured, that is, 'how far the structured conditions of people's existence *create* these forms of diversity' (Williams, 1992: 208; author's emphasis). Thus, the individual consumer of welfare is not simply free to choose, but is someone whose needs and choices are constituted as well as articulated through a plurality of divisions and differences (e.g., class, gender, 'race' and age) that interact with one another in a dynamic relationship (Williams, 1992: 214). The key, for Williams, is how to translate into policy terms a universal service provision that is also capable of meeting diverse and differentiated needs (cf. Young, 1987). The answer may lie in what she terms 'new social welfare movements' which comprise a panoply of groups expressing specific needs collectively (from HIV+ groups to reproductive rights groups), but

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which are united by a concern with 'the nitty-gritty of empowerment, representation, and ensuring the quality and accountability of user-centred provision' (Williams, 1992: 216).

This concern for the nitty-gritty brings us back to the issue of material conditions and the problem that this poses for the development of a critical social policy that includes an account of NSMs. How can NSM theory be applied in social policy given the latter's ongoing concern with material/distribution issues and the former's concern with a post-materialism which seemingly consigns these issues to the past? This is also a crucial problem for Williams who has developed an approach that privileges issues of identity, autonomy and equal worth while retaining a concern for the allocation of material resources and distribution rights (Williams, 1999: 673).

Using 'a politics of recognition', Williams shows how NSMs are about struggles for equal moral worth which, if sustained, must be mutual, relational and dialogic. Drawing on Honneth, she argues that these struggles over moral worth move beyond interests based on objective inequalities and the distribution of material opportunities and into 'the web of moral feelings' (Honneth, 1996: 161). There is a caveat, however. Recognition struggles comprise the politics of redistribution *and* recognition (see Fraser, 1995). In Britain, welfare struggles 'demonstrate *par excellence* that struggles for recognition almost inevitably involve some aspect of redistribution' (Williams, 1999: 675). For example, migrants' struggles around health care, education, community and social care, 'were about claiming cultural respect as well as the redistribution of rights and goods' (Williams, 1999: 681).

Central to Williams's version of active citizenship are social movements which give voice to the users of welfare services and are thereby involved in the democratization of the provider–user relationship (Williams, 1999: 683). This, though, depends upon a radical, pluralist notion of democracy which can both account for and address the competing claims of different groups. Williams proposes that this be called *the politics of differentiated universalism*, which entails 'developing solidarities based on the respect of difference [or in] the pursuit of unity in dialogues of difference' (Williams, 1999: 684). This mutual respect of worth and tolerance of diversity must not and, indeed, cannot stand alone because such a politics also has to involve the redistribution of goods:

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> If groups simply pursue the politics of recognition without addressing socioeconomic inequalities, then they will win social justice for some in their group, but not for others. On the other hand, the singular pursuit of issues of economic inequality can render invisible cultural injustices which render some groups more vulnerable to economic exploitation.
> (Williams, 1999: 684)

Williams's vision of a radical, plural democracy compares with that of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) and other postmodern political theorists (see Hewitt, 1996). However, it is better placed to consider not only the variety of social conflicts that exist in contemporary society, but also the issues of power, politics, marginalization and oppression that are omitted from postmodern accounts of protest from below (cf. Handler, 1992). Furthermore, there are stark similarities between Williams's work on the politics of recognition and Melucci's work in this area.

Melucci argues that a movement's collective identity cannot be seen simply in terms of its self-identification since a collective actor must also achieve social recognition. He refers to this as 'the relational dimension of collective identity' (Melucci, 1995: 47–8). Thus, the unity of collective action that is produced and sustained by processes of self-identification 'rests on the ability of a movement to locate itself within a system of relations' (Melucci, 1995: 47). A collective actor cannot construct its identity in a vacuum. It needs in some way to be recognized by other social and political actors and this may take a number of forms ranging from acceptance, denial or even repression (see Ellison and Martin, 2000). Social policy, then, must examine what happens when mutual respect is not accorded to movements who make claims around welfare needs just as when it is. It must also explore possible ways of overcoming this.

There are parallels between Williams's proposition, that the structured conditions of people's existence creates diversity, and the arguments of some critics of NSM theory. Bartholomew and Mayer (1992: 147) seem to agree, claiming that issues of power and inequality ought not to be too readily discarded in favour of a more Foucauldian approach whereby power relations are ubiquitous. For this reason, they are critical of Melucci's conception of complex society as it emphasizes pluralized choices and new opportunities which negate an 'understanding of the field *as structured by* relations of hierarchy and unequal power' (Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992: 148;

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emphasis in original). Both approaches therefore sound a cautionary note. Not only must the dangers of presenting overly voluntaristic accounts be avoided. We must also make sure that the concept of diversity is not decoupled from that of inequality but, instead, connected to it.

The argument here is that Williams's work bridges the gap between NSM theory and its post-Fordist critics. This is because she 'joins up' the material and the cultural, the historical and the contemporary and reconciles the notion of inequality to that of diversity. These arguments ought to be taken seriously as they provide a powerful antidote to the malady that has plagued NSM theory since its inception, namely the questionable novelty of NSMs. It does this by demonstrating that contemporary welfare movements are concerned with structural inequalities which are emergent and/or entrenched and by suggesting that for some groups cultural oppression is just as important as economic hardship (cf. Penna and O'Brien, 1996: 58). Future studies may also profit by considering whether social movements that are ostensibly 'new' raise welfare issues or have implications for social policy. Work has already begun in this area, showing how that most lauded of all NSMs, the green movement, expresses an ecological critique of social welfare (Barry, 1998; Fitzpatrick, 1998). This article now turns, finally, to look at Taylor's work on women's self-help movements which have themselves affected social policy.

Women's self-help and postpartum depression

It must be made clear that Verta Taylor is not an NSM theorist as such. However, as will be apparent, she does share with Melucci and other European scholars a concern for the cultural and symbolic dimensions of social movements. Set out here are the arguments she makes about women's self-help and postpartum depression in the United States that are relevant to the discussion of social movements, welfare and social policy. In this section of the article it is shown how we might examine contemporary welfare struggles that are both about redistribution and recognition and that pose challenges to symbolic codes and institutional practices that may transform social policy.

It was shown in the introduction how Taylor's work is premised on the view that there has been a gendering of social movement theory which has caused analysts to adopt a strict political inter-

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pretation of the success of movements. This has also meant that they are less concerned with *what* movements accomplish than with *how* they mobilize (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 123). What is most significant about Taylor's approach is that it not only gives credibility to self-help as a form of social protest, but is also concerned with what this might mean in policy terms. This credibility is needed since women's self-help has been regarded as 'an apolitical variety of cultural feminism or identity politics' (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 125).

In a manner similar to Williams, Taylor demonstrates that women's self-help movements are concerned with the redistribution of power, but are also 'heavily cultural and revolve around disputed meanings and contested identities' (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 128). Indeed, it is part of her wider project to see how social movements contribute to the reconstruction of gender relations in society. Along with her colleague, Van Willigen, Taylor shows how the postpartum movement poses several challenges to gender relations, institutional practices and to social policy.

First, through 'speak-outs' the movement brings postpartum illness into the public eye and challenges images of femininity that tie women to the private realm of the home and to motherhood. However, it is only when collectivities, not individuals, engage in and publicize new gender practices that a serious challenge is posed to the gender order (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 128). The postpartum movement also highlights the oppressive nature of the motherhood role. Women with postpartum depression are thus able to define a new kind of mother; one that differs from the traditional or ideal mother only because she suffers a complication of pregnancy (Taylor, 1999: 27).

Second, unlike the women's health movement of the 1970s, the postpartum movement is in favour of the medicalization of women's conditions because this is seen as a means of gaining access to and exerting control over medical resources and treatments. Opponents of this strategy argue that medicalization could increase or reinforce women's reliance on the male-dominated medical establishment without altering the structural inequalities that have given rise to women's health problems. On the other hand, Taylor and Van Willigen (1996: 134) believe 'it is difficult to argue with the claim that women's self-help movements, by demanding a role in medical diagnosis and

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treatment, pose a gender-based challenge to the lay/expert dichotomy that undergirds medicine's institutional legitimacy'.

The third point relates to the larger social significance of women's self-help movements and their symbolic resonance. The similarities with Melucci's observations are quite obvious. Taylor (1999: 18) says that the crux of women's self help is found in submerged networks and social movement communities. This is why the formation of a collective identity is vital and part of a 'prefigurative politics' (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 134). Thus:

> [W]omen's self-help communities strive to exemplify a better way of organising society by constructing a distinctive women's culture of caring in which participants can find emotional support as well as receive practical information to understand and overcome their problems.
> (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 135)

By building a collective identity, self-help groups are able to connect women's personal experiences to the general problem of gender subordination.

Fourth, by challenging the existing gender order, women's self-help movements set new dilemmas that have clear implications for social policy. By encouraging husbands of women with postpartum depression to participate in housework and childcare as well as provide support and understanding, the movement poses a challenge to the gendered division of care in society (Taylor and Van Willigen, 1996: 136). Moreover, self-help groups mount a challenge to the gender division of labour by placing a moral significance on caring where it would otherwise be devalued and when women are increasingly less able to care for others as a result of their expanded participation in the workforce.

In short, the case of the postpartum depression movement illustrates how women's self-help combines issues of redistribution and inequality with cultural and symbolic issues. Importantly, though, it shows how both of these might affect social policies and welfare provision. The movement challenges gender inequality 'by targeting the practices and logic of social institutions, including medicine, the family, and the law, that inscribe gender difference and maintain gender stratification' (Taylor, 1999: 26). Activists have also questioned the way medical knowledge and practice is constructed by gaining access to medical information and resources. Finally, the movement poses a cultural or symbolic challenge which has sig-

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nificance for the provision of social care and, indeed, the conception of care in society. It does this by contesting gendered care roles and by alerting society to the contradictions of motherhood that do not necessarily infuse new mothers with a joyous desire to love and care for their babies.

Conclusion

In this article, it is argued that NSM theory may illuminate contemporary welfare struggles. It has been shown, however, that a major drawback of NSM theory is its tendency to ignore issues of material redistribution and structural inequality, and that this ultimately prevents it from considering welfare struggles in any meaningful way. A critical social policy, on the other hand, combines both issues of redistribution and social recognition which tend to coexist, in varying degrees, in all social movements. It is suggested that Taylor's work on women's self-help movements might inform future research into collective action in social policy because it provides an example of how movements that are chiefly cultural, symbolic and geared towards a politics of identity can challenge and may transform social policy.

Notes

This article is the outcome of work conducted as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Research Group for the Study of Care, Values and the Future of Welfare (CAVA) which is based in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds. Part of this research involves the empirical investigation of collective welfare claims and campaigns in relation to issues of parenting and partnering. The article was originally presented as a CAVA workshop paper and I would like to thank Hazel May who acted as discussant during this session along with others who participated. I also wish to thank the anonymous referees for their guidance and Malcolm Harrison, Martin O'Brien, Sasha Roseneil and Fiona Williams for their comments and suggestions.

1. Perhaps men's movements conform to a 'masculine logic'? Research undertaken by Bertoia and Drakich (1993) in Canada seems to suggest that often men join the father's rights movement not simply for emotional support, but also for instrumental reasons.
2. See Melucci (1996: 90) for a response to the post-Fordist critique.

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