

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement*. Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 204 pp. \$US 24.99 paper (978-0-521-71767-0), \$US 80.00 hardcover (978-0-521-88892-9)

Sharon Erickson Nepstad's book, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement*, is an historical comparative analysis of the Plowshares movement, a pacifist movement initiated by members of the Catholic Left who engaged in dramatic tactics such as pouring blood on conscription files, burning draft records, and using hammers to damage nuclear weapons. These actions often resulted in the arrest of Plowshare activists and long prison sentences. What is interesting about this movement is that, despite often inhospitable political contexts, resource deprivation, relatively few "wins," the high cost of participation, and severe repression from the state, the movement has grown in the past 30 years and diffused from the US around the world. Other movements that face these obstacles, such as the larger antiwar movement of which the Plowshares are a part, often decline or fall into lulls of mobilization over time. This anomaly makes the Plowshares movement an interesting case study to assess the factors which lead to the rise, decline, and persistence of movements over time.

Nepstad uses participant observation, mail surveys of Plowshare activists (N=54), interviews (N=35), and archival research to answer three main research questions. First, what developmental challenges do activists face and how do their choices shape the trajectories of their movements over time? Second, how have US Plowshares activists sustained their resistance for decades, even when the cost of participation is high, political opportunities have fluctuated, and other movements have declined? And, third, what can be learned by comparing the progression of this movement in the US to other movements in the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, Sweden, and Great Britain?

This book is well positioned within the social movement literature. The first chapter offers a very succinct and informative reformulation of the research explaining movement emergence, expansion, decline, and abeyance. This chapter is useful for both scholars of social movements and students new to the area. As Nepstad explains, the literature in the

area posits that movements emerge and decline in wave-like cycles of protest. Sometimes the lulls in mobilization, called abeyance structures, are followed by a re-emergence of protest activity and sometimes they signal the decline of a movement which will not re-emerge. Nepstad adds to our understanding of these macro-movement processes by positing alternative trajectories that movements can take, in addition to the classic waves and lulls of mobilization. By examining three additional trajectories — intermittent activity, limited expansion, and sustained or persistent movement — she adds considerable insight into macro-movement processes that is applicable to social movements generally.

Nepstad argues that the trajectory a movement follows is determined by its ability to establish legitimacy, decide about movement structure and leadership, retain members, diffuse cross-nationally, and adapt culturally. The Plowshares movement faced challenges in all of these areas and, depending on how they handled these developmental challenges, the international Plowshares movement branches have unfolded in different ways. I will highlight Nepstad's discussion of two of these factors.

First, movements struggle with issues of legitimacy. The Plowshares movement is a part of a larger anti-war movement. There are certainly some disagreements within this larger movement about the legitimacy of the extreme tactics employed by the Plowshares, such as pouring blood or destroying government property. The Plowshares activists had to offer convincing explanations of their use of these controversial tactics. Nepstad's use of the comparative case studies illuminates how legitimacy can be garnered in such a situation of tactical innovation. For example, while the US movement was able to bolster their legitimacy through appeals to religious doctrine and teaching, the German, Dutch, Australian, and orthodox British Groups were not able to do this for a variety of reasons and, therefore, never fully mobilized.

In addition, the Plowshares movement faced challenges in retaining members. The extremely high cost and risk of participation in the movement, including long prison sentences and state repression, could pose a serious problem for the continuity of the movement. Nepstad outlines a number of techniques used by the Plowshares to mitigate these effects, including community solidarity and social ties which work to alleviate biographical constraints (e.g., people who can look after your children if you have to go to jail). This discussion illuminates the ways in which movements, even those that are high cost and risk, can retain members over time.

The concluding chapter is the most compelling section of the book. It offers a nuanced and persuasive set of arguments taking the conclusions that Nepstad has drawn about the Plowshares movements and creates a

generalizable theory of movement persistence over time. Her claim that “social movement trajectories are influenced by macro forces — such as escalating levels of repression, shifting public opinion, changing political alliances, and world events — but they are not determined by them” (p. 219) is compelling and well supported. In addition to the importance of these macro factors, Nepstad re-emphasizes the role of micro factors, such as movement infrastructure and leadership, establishing legitimacy, cultural adaptations, and activist retention in sustaining a movement over time. As a whole, the book offers an in-depth examination of the US Plowshares movement throughout history and a comparative analysis of divergent pathways that the international Plowshare movements took. In addition, she extends her analysis by offering a compelling and theoretically informed discussion of movement trajectories over time.

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