

Analysis of the relationship between sociology of religion and social movement

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Abstract

The study of social movements and the sociology of religion share common similarities and they can benefit from each other. Theorizing for both fields is somehow similar. This paper is an attempt to briefly present the supply-side and resource mobilization theories in the studies of the sociology of religion and the literature of social movements. The paper is a sort of comparative analysis for the sociology of religion and the literature of social movements. It presents a brief literature review of the supply-side theory, and some examples of studies that have used this model; brief presentation of the resource mobilization theory; and finally an assessment of the recruitment tactics and commitment levels in both fields of sociology.

Keywords: *Sociology of religion; social movement; supply-side theory; resource mobilization.*

1. Introduction

The study of social movements and the sociology of religion share common similarities and they can benefit from each other. Theorizing for both fields is somehow similar. This paper is an attempt to briefly present the supply-side and resource mobilization theories in the studies of the sociology of religion and the literature of social movements. Since the seventies, the resource mobilization theory has been dominating the field of social movements, but not any more. In the last decade, the supply-side theory gained a lot of support for its hypotheses from studies that have been conducted on religious studies in the United States and Europe. However, this model also received some critique from various scholars in many studies. Nonetheless, one is of the view that at the present time, this model is very convincing in its assumptions and hypotheses. This paper will be some sort of comparative analysis for the sociology of religion and the literature of social movements. We shall present a brief literature review of the supply-side theory, and some examples of studies that have used this model; brief presentation of the resource mobilization theory; and finally an assessment of the recruitment tactics and commitment levels in both fields of sociology.

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2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Macro Level

The supply-side theory suggests that religious participation inclines when there is available religious supply and that religious competition increases religious participation. It also suggests that religious monopoly and state support decreases the level of religious participation (Froese 2001, Stark and Iannaccone, 1994). The state plays an important role in controlling the level of religious competition. The state might leave the religious market free of regulations or very minor ones (the United States, for example), or regulate and restrict religious practices (former USSR and East Europe in the past), or support one or two religious firms and restrict other unwanted religious groups, (Latin America, Gill 1998).

Finke and Iannaccone (1993) described religion as an object of choice and production. In their economic model, they view churches and religious administrators as producers who design their products and design how to market them. While consumers, on the other hand, choose from the religious market what they want to adapt and to what extent they want to participate in it. In a free religious market, religious producers compete to produce goods that can attract consumers and keep up with the market. They also noted the importance of the government role in regulating or deregulating this type of market (Finke and Iannaccone 1993, Chaves and Cann 1992). In the religious market, religious firms compete to produce attractive commodities, and consumers choose what religion (if any) they will participate in and how much involvement they will have in it (Iannaccone, 1991).

It is argued that in the absence of state regulations on religion, religious competition will increase, which will lead to high level of religious participation. Froese tested this assumption in his study on Hungary, 2001. He agrees that as a communist country, Hungary witnessed a relatively low level of religious participation. Little before the mid 1990s, anti religion campaigns started and church lands were nationalized. Later, the state started regulating religion and nationalizing church schools to prevent the church's influence on the young generation and alienate them from religion. Secularization doctrine at the same time gained a lot of support and followers, and the state declared itself as an atheist country in 1949. Religious participation and church attendance were dropping during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. This drop can be explained by state regulations on religion and the methods of coercion that were used to enforce these regulations. All churches had to sign an agreement with the state that regulates and limits their activities. Church officials and religious leaders had suffered many forms of harassment and pure coercion (2001).

Froese used data from the World Values Survey that was collected in 1981, in which the country was under the communist regime, and in 1990, in which the country has new laws that grant religious freedom. The data showed strong support to the supply-side hypothesis. In 1981, the percentage of Hungarian population that indicated that they pray was 45%, while in 1990, the percentage was 57%. This indicates an increase in the level of religious participation.

Even though Eastern Europe has provided a strong support for the supply-side theory after communism, there were some exceptions that did not appear to support the economic model. The exceptions are best described by the cases of Poland and East Germany. The economic model may appear to be unable to explain these cases. Research

indicates that the level religious participation had decreased after the collapse of communism and even after the emergence of laws that allowed free religious market. According to the economic model, the decrease of government regulations on religion will increase the level of religious participation. Churches regained their institutional freedom and the public is allowed to participate in religion.

Furthermore, a free religious market that will allow free religious competition will increase religious consumption. However, this was not the case in Poland and East Germany. The level of religious participation had decreased even though religious pluralism was there. Nonetheless, a study on these two countries done by Froese and Pfaff (2001) used to further advance the economic model and provide an explanation for these two cases. In their study, they use claims and explanations of sociologists of religion that help serving and advancing the economic model. It is argued that in specific situations, such as conflict instead of competition, may produce high-level religiosity (Stark and Finke, 2000). It is also claimed that some groups use their religious communities as “free social spaces” like marginalized groups, social and political movements (Sherkat and Ellison, 1999). Religious communities may become a source of support to marginalized groups and provide support to social movements. For example, the role of black churches in civil right movement, religious institutions in the Middle East. Churches also have a role of presenting the nation’s identity “national church”, this role become possible to occur when there is a monopoly of one religion. In this case this church would be able to carry the identity of the nation (Bruce, 1999). This type of churches will have committed members during communism, because they will be a symbol of nationalism and opposition to communism. As a result, the collapse of communism will lead to low rate of membership and commitment. Therefore, the reduction of religious participation in this situation should not contradict with the general assumptions of the economic model (Froese and Pfaff, 2001).

Iannaccone indicates that the level of religious belief and participation tend to be low what he religious market is monopolized, and tend to be high when the religious market is competitive (1991). In the case of Poland, the Catholic Church during communism was privileged with the monopoly over the religious market, which according to the economic model should gain low rate of participation and little commitment of its members, but this was not the case. Having the monopoly, the Catholic Church became the national church that gave the Poles their cultural identity. It was a symbol of a strong nation that resists the atheistic communist government. As a result, the collapse of communism will vanish the need for this type of church because there are no conflicts anymore.

The situation in East Germany was a little different than that of Poland. Before the collapse of communism, the church used to have some sort of autonomy and served as an alternative for the state controlled institutions. After the collapse, the church lost that position, individual who participated in the religious activities for political reasons and to oppose communism do not need to get involved with church anymore. The new political system provided freedom for the individuals to pursue their personal interests. The merge of the Lutheran Church in East Germany with the Evangelical Church Association after the union of the republic might be another reason for the religiosity decline in East Germany. This merge brought the German federal law of the church taxes for member of religious organizations. Furthermore, the church’s involvement in East Germany before the collapse

of communism appeared to be a positive involvement to the public, but after the unification, the church appeared to be involved in political wrongdoing.

One of the assumptions of the supply-side theory is that religious participation will be high when religion is less regulated by the state. Chaves et al (1994) provided support to the supply-side theory by testing this hypothesis on minority groups. They argued that this hypothesis applies on the Muslim minorities in the Christian dominated societies. They included 18 countries that have Muslim minorities in their study. They used the rate in which Muslims do the “hajj” to Mecca as an indicator of religious participation. They found a negative relationship between the state regulation and the religious participation. Once the socioeconomic status is controlled, religious participation (practicing the hajj) tend to be higher in the less regulated countries.

2.2. Mezzo Level

Iannaccone argues that strict churches are stronger than weak churches, he states, “strictness makes organizations stronger and more attractive” (1994: p. 1180). He argues that Protestantism since 1950s started losing members, and the trend was that liberal denominations have the highest decline rate comparing to conservative denominations, while the most conservative denominations were growing. Iannaccone notes that religion is a social phenomenon that, in practice, has to be experienced in groups, “religion is a commodity that people produce collectively” (1994: p. 1183).

Religious organizations are always faced with the problem of free riding. This problem emerges when members of an organization receive benefits from the organization because of their collective work. Each member receives these benefits regardless of his/her own efforts. Some members, rationally and following their own interest or even sometimes unintentionally, try to reduce the effort and “free-ride off those of others”. Strict churches indirectly reduce the problem of free riding by penalizing and prohibiting members from participating in other activities that may use the members’ resources. Penalties and prohibitions push the less committed members out of the organization. There are some activities that are easily monitored, but there are some activities that are hard to monitor such as drinking, smoking, sex and eating. Iannaccone agrees that these activities are hard to monitor, but still, the deception cost will be high. It would be easy to hide yourself when you drink alcohol, and it is not the same when you drink in parties or bars.

Iannaccone measures church strictness by developing an order for the strictness or distinctiveness of various religions, and compares it to church attendance. The results show consistency with the suggested hypothesis. He also tested the Protestant denominational differences. He used a scale of level of strictness (liberal, moderate, and conservative) and compared the differences between these three denominations regarding income, education, attendance, church contributions, membership in church affiliated groups, and secular membership. From the data, for “every variable the pattern of variation is monotonic, increasing (or decreasing) steadily as one moves from liberal to moderate to conservative” (1994: p. 1194). For income, education and secular membership, the variables tend to decrease when we move from liberal to conservative, while for attendance and membership in church affiliated groups, the variables tend to increase when we move in the same direction. Therefore, the stricter the organization is, its members tend to be poorer and less educated, they also tend to contribute more to the church and attend services more than those of less strict churches. While people who are liberal and religiously moderate have more tendencies to participate in secular activities and participate in organizations

outside the church. Iannaccone believes that “a high-cost group maintains its strict norms of conduct precisely because they limit participation in competing activities and thereby raise levels of participation within the group” (1994: p. 1197).

Semi-Involuntary Participation

In their study on church participation among black Americans, Ellison and Sherkat (1995) investigated “the regional variations in African American religious life” (1995: p. 1415). They compared black communities of the south to communities of urban non-south regarding three issues:

1. social role of religious institutions;
2. availability of alternative lifestyles and secular opportunities for status and resources;
3. social norms and community expectations regarding church involvement (1995: 1415).

They suggested that: 1) church participation will be the highest among the rural southern communities; 2) because of the semi-involuntary thesis; the southerners will be more likely to participate intermittently and less likely to abandon the church than non-southerners. According to the semi-voluntary thesis, the norms of church participation and the social sanctions on individuals who do not participate will be highest among the rural south. They also hypothesized that “the magnitude of the relationships between perceived rewards of congregational involvement and reported patterns of church participation will be weakest among rural southerners and strongest among non-southerners” (1995: p. 1419).

To test these hypotheses, they used data from the National Survey of Black Americans (NSBA), and household probability samples gathered by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The results were consistent with the hypotheses. Church participation is highest among rural-south communities, and rural southerners are more likely to engage in religious activities. Blacks from urban and suburban non-south who do not receive benefits from their congregational involvement search for happiness in secular venues without having the problem of social sanctions.

2.3. Individual Level

In many cases, religious consumers are underestimated and viewed as passive recipients of religion (Iannaccone, 1990). Church members do not rely completely on the clergy, but they also use their skills and experiences to find religious satisfaction. Iannaccone uses the economic model of household production and human capital to test a model of religious participation. The personal skills and experience contain religious knowledge, some type of knowledge of the church doctrine and rituals, and social relations with other worshippers, which Iannaccone calls them religious human capital. This human capital is important to enable the individual to produce and appreciate religious commodities, without this “religious investment” it is hard (or even impossible) to appreciate religious services, because you have to have the means to understand and become familiar with these services. Thus, religious mobility “becomes progressively less likely as people age” (1990: p. 313).

3. Social Movements

Supply-side theory has a significant dominance over the sociology of religion it did and still develops the field of sociology in explaining religious participation among other things. It is documented in that literature that most religious affiliations and groups tend to be more active in recruiting people when there is competition in the religious market and when there is no monopoly in the religious market. Consistently, social movements can become more active when there is competition in the market, too. In the literature of protest movements, Olzak and Uhrig (2001) argued, “competition and legitimating processes affected the rates of protest activities” (p. 695). In the sociology of religious literature it is argued from the supply-side theory’s point of view that legitimacy of a religious group is expected to increase the popularity of that group, unless it has a monopoly over the market. But when this group is illegitimate and banded by the state, it usually faces a lot of troubles and obstacles to survive. Social movements are similar to religious groups in that sense, “legitimizing of a practice or an organizational form increases its frequency or popularity by increasing rates of initiation and decreasing rates of abandonment” (2001: p. 695).

Social movements like religious movements, compete for limited resources. They compete for a niche that has a limited capacity, and the survival is for the fittest. The success of one movement depletes the resources for other movements. Therefore, movements try to innovate different tactics and methods for their political behaviour. In a competitive market, innovations are encouraged. As a result, when movement tactics produce successful results, these tactics become imitated and used by other movements. Olzak and Uhrig stated “replicated activated may become institutionalized as routine political behaviour” (2001: p. 695). Imitations of tactics and activities in the organizations literature are called isomorphism (I do not have my articles and notes from the complex organizations’ class), which is the adoption of the methods and tactics of other successful organizations.

4. Resource Mobilization Theory

Resource mobilization theory is one of the essential theories in social movements. This theory in general deals with the dynamics and tactics of social movements when they grow, decline, and change. It also examines all kinds of resources that need to be mobilized, the relationships between social movement and other groups, the need of social movement for external support for its success, and the tactics that the state uses to facilitate or oppress a social movement (McCarthy and Zald, 1977). This perspective considers the study of the aggregation of resources (money and labour) crucial for understanding social movement. Resource aggregation requires some sort of organization. Furthermore, the participation of individuals or groups from outside the collectivity is very crucial for the success or failure of a movement.

There are some assumptions for the resource mobilization perspective. First, social movements do not have to be based on grievance, and constituents are the ones who provide the movement with the major support of resources. It’s also not always that those supporters have commitment to the value and beliefs of the movement. Second, they see that social movements have all kinds of strategic tasks in dealing with authorities. These tasks vary from tactics to mobilize resources, neutralize opponents and make them by standards, and transforming the masses into sympathizers. Third, they believe that society is the entity that provides all the means that a social movement may need. And it provides

the infrastructure in which social movements utilize, such as media, levels of affluence, access to institutional centers, networks (1977: p. 1217).

Some organizations depend heavily on volunteer labour (religious organizations, for example), while others purchase labour. They see the SMOs goals as products and the adherents as demand. They agree that the higher the education of individuals, the more likely that they would give time, and people who give more time to volunteer are expected to give more money (1977: p. 1224).

5. Recruitment

Social movements can use a variety of tactics for mobilization; these could be on macro, mezzo, or micro level of mobilization. Macro mobilization may occur when an SMO advertises itself nationwide and to target all sects of society via TV networks, or organizational networks. Mezzo level mobilization is the mobilization of subgroups, minorities, specific sects of society or members of other SMOs within the same SMI. Micro mobilization is a mobilization on the individual level that targets individuals through personal networks, or personal interaction (Snow *et al*, 1986).

Religious groups and religious movements use very similar tactics for mobilization and recruitment. They try to mobilize supporters on many different levels. They target the general public, racial, or ethnic groups, and individual. Furthermore, it seems that social movements are more successful in utilizing social networks in their processes of recruitment than religious groups. Scholars of the sociology of religion admit that there is a “present weakness of the empirical basis for the network component of recruitment theories” (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980: p. 1377). Stark and Bainbridge (1980) tried to provide some empirical support for the argument that interpersonal relations are at the center of the recruitment process. In their paper, they traced the development of two lines of the recruitment process; the old one that focuses on the ideology of religious cults and sects, and the needs of its potential recruits, and the more advanced one which focuses on the interpersonal relation as an essential element for recruitment. Their study focused on cults and sects, and it suggested that cults and sects are similar to deviant movements that tend to recruit people that have grievance and suffer from depravation. Also, to understand whom a set or a cult may recruit, it is important to see who the beneficiaries from its ideologies are.

In some earlier studies, Lofland and Stark (1965) studied the Moonies, and they concluded those interpersonal bonds between cult members and potential adherents are essential to recruitment. They argued that when these bonds existed, people joined, and when those bonds did not exist, recruitment failed and people did not join. The acceptance for the ideology usually came later after people have already joined. In the case of the Mormons, bonds between church members and non-Mormons are the center of the recruitment to the Mormon Church. Interpersonal ties and bonds are important for recruiting new adherents for cults and sects because people who join need to have trust and confidence relations with members because most of these groups radical or extreme and different from the main line stream. More studies provided support for the important role that interpersonal relations play in recruitment in cults and sects (Hardyck and Barden 1962, Nordquist 1978 cited in Stark and Bainbridge 1980). All these studies provided strong support for this thesis; nonetheless, this thesis has lesser empirical support in conventional faiths.

6. Commitment

There are some differences between social movements and religious groups and organizations regarding commitment. It seems to me that members of most social movements lack strong commitment to their ideas and beliefs, or at least lack the same level of commitment religious groups' members has. This paper tries to provide explanations for this trend in the following paragraphs. One of the reasons for this trend is strictness, as indicated in the above. Most religious affiliations and religious groups that are known as strict have high level of commitment. It is argued that liberal denominations decline more rapidly than conservative ones, not only that but, conservative denominations grow (Iannaccone, 1994; Finke 1997; Iannaccone, Olson and Stark, 1995). In his paper, *Why Strict Churches are Strong*. Iannaccone (1994) argued that people who join strict churches and remain members in them are the ones who have strong beliefs and commitment. As a result, those people are willing to conduct a lot of activities (volunteer, donate, and participate in religious activities) that they would not do if they were not highly committed to their churches. Free riding is a problem that exists in almost all social and religious movements. Raising the cost of participation decreases the free-riding problem. Strict churches have high cost demands and prohibitions such as the prohibition of joining secular activities; therefore, members who remain in these churches are the ones who are willing to meet these demands. Consequently, members of strict churches are people who have high commitment. Most social movements, however, do not have this kind of strictness and as a result they usually have lower rate of commitment than religious groups. Religious groups, unlike most social movement, limit and restrict non-group activities to increase the production of collective goods and commitment (Finke, 1997). You cannot be a Muslim and participate in religious Hindu activities, but you can be a peace activist and a women's rights activist too.

The supply-side theory provides us with the argument that if a religious denomination has a monopoly over the market, religious participation and commitment will be low, and vice versa. In a study done on Catholics, Stark and McCann (1993) showed that "ordination rates, the ratio of priests to nominal Catholics, and catholic school enrolments are proportionality highest where Catholics are few" (1993: p. 111). Competition and plurality is expected to increase participation and in turn increase commitment.

Montgomery (1996) argued, "Individuals with higher incomes prefer less strict denominations" (1996: 1, electronic version). He claimed that there has been a misunderstanding to the dynamic nature religious economy, and he provided a model that explains this economy. There was always a decline in some religious denominations, and, at the same time, increase in some other denominations. But the mistake was that this decline was perceived as a result of secularization. According to Montgomery, the religious economy as a whole remains stable. He illustrated his argument by giving an example that a strict denomination start with members from a low class, and over time most of those people gain some social upward mobility. As a consequence, they may consider lowering the strictness of their denomination and secularize it. When they succeed, individuals with lower class income move out of that denomination and form a strict sect, while their first denomination becomes secularized. This is an example that explains the secularization of some denominations and the formation of new ones, and the religious economy over all remains stable.

Another reasons for the difference of commitment between social movements and religious groups is that most people who join conventional faiths do join because of the ideas and the ideologies of these faiths. In most cases, the ideas of a religion appeal to its potential adherents and make sense to them, and then they join. Recruitment in social movements, on the other hand, depends heavily on social networks and personal ties. Ideology and ideas receive more attention from conventional religious groups than social movements.

7. Framing Perspective

Social movements started to have more focus on ideas and beliefs since the development of frame analysis perspective by Snow *et al* (1986). Scholars of the framing perspective argue that the actors who actively engage in their productions develop ideas and meanings. Benford and Snow (2000) argued that social movements should not be viewed as carriers of ideas that have been developed from structural arrangements and existing ideologies, but rather “movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (2000: p. 613). They see framing as an active processual construction of meanings. It is active because there is action that is being done and processual because it is evolving and changing, not static. Resonance of the framing processes is central to this perspective. Bedford (1993) stated that frame resonance is “how reality should be presented” instead of “what reality ought to be real” (1993: p. 679). The concept of resonance is related to the effectiveness of proffered framings, and it shows if some framings are effective or not (Benford and Snow, 2000).

8. Donations

Social movements and religious groups and organizations tend to have similar trends toward donations and contributions. It is argued that in sociology of religion, people who are strongly committed to God will give more money to the church (Hoge and Yang, 1994). Iannaccone (1997) argued, “the distribution of the amount of money that is being contributed to any church is skewed” (1997: p. 141). He tried to explain this skewness in terms of three facts: 1. percentage rates of donations differ from one case to another, 2. income is also different, 3. there is a weak correlation between the income a household has and the amount of donation they given to a church. He indicated that most people contribute between zero and 4% of their income with a mean of about 2%. There is a weak relationship between income and donations (income only explains 1% of the variation, 1997).

9. Conclusion

This was a brief presentation of the supply-side and resource mobilization theories of the sociology of religion and the studies of social movements. We presented these theories briefly to see and understand the relativeness of those two fields of sociology. There are a lot of similarities in their recruitment tactics and tasks. And we thought it would be helpful and beneficial for both fields to understand and share their commonalties. These and assumptions from both sides can be applied and operationalized in either field. However, we are not saying that there are no differences and variation from each other. This paper is a humble attempt to lay out these commonalties and differences. Sociologists

of social movements or the sociology of religion might be able to benefit from these fields and learn from what have been done them.

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