

High-Risk Collective Action: Defending Human Rights in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina¹

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Under what conditions will individuals risk their lives to resist repressive states? This question is addressed through comparative analysis of the emergence of human rights organizations under military dictatorships in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. While severe state repression is expected to lead to generalized demobilization, these cases reveal that repression may directly stimulate collective action. The potential for sustained collective action in high-risk contexts depends upon the relationship between strategies of repression and the particular configuration of embedded social networks; it is more likely where dense yet diverse interpersonal networks are embedded within broader national and transnational institutional and issue networks.

First, we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then their sympathizers; then the indifferent and finally, the timid. (attributed to Brig. General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean, former governor of Buenos Aires)

INTRODUCTION

From the mid-1960s into the late 1980s, military governments in Latin America systematically and ferociously violated human rights as defined by the international community with the adoption of the Universal Decla-

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ration of Human Rights in 1948. Barbaric torture, murders, "disappearances,"² and disregard for civil liberties and rights became commonplace. In response, individuals and small groups of citizens protested against these policies, called for changes in government behavior, and sought to support and assist victims. Human rights organizations (HROs) formed, and a diffuse human rights movement arose in most of Latin America.

In some countries, HROs formed quickly and had significant social support. In others, HROs developed relatively later, were more fragile, and were less influential. In all cases, however, those participating in HROs faced potential retribution, even death, for opposing the incumbent dictatorships.

This article seeks to explain the emergence of sustained collective action in such "high-risk" contexts. Specifically, it attempts to account for the emergence of HROs in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina in contexts where the potential consequences included arrest, torture, disappearance, or murder of participants, their friends, and their family members.³ In short, why and how did individuals organize resistance in the face of extremely repressive governments? Further, what accounts for the significant differences in the timing of the emergence of HROs in these countries?

Asking these questions draws attention to the paucity of explicit attempts in the social movement literature to explain the emergence of sustained collective action in contexts of life-threatening risk. Most social movement theory stems from research into low-risk forms of mobilization. However, as McAdam (1986) suggests, the mobilization dynamics of high-risk movements are likely to be qualitatively different from those of low-risk movements. This article suggests that explanation of the emergence of HROs in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina requires a synthetic theoretical approach that focuses attention on links between interpersonal and embedded social and political networks, resource mobilization capacity, identity construction prior to and in the process of participation, and the

² The word "disappearances" refers to kidnappings and murders not acknowledged by governments.

³ The central empirical focus of this article is the human rights organizations (HROs) that emerged in each country. Recognizing that social movement organizations are only one possible form of the *organization of collective action* in a social movement (Tarrow 1994, p. 136), this account focuses on HROs for two reasons: first, available accounts of the early years of these movements by participants and scholars suggest that they consisted first and foremost of the networks of individuals working under the auspices of HROs. Second, these accounts also indicate that HROs provided the "mobilizing structures" (Tarrow 1994, p. 136) that linked diverse elements of the movement domestically and internationally.

modalities and extent of state repression that shape the political opportunity structure.⁴

THEORETICAL APPROACH

This investigation on human rights organizations in Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s asks two basic and interrelated theoretical questions: (1) When (under what conditions) do high-risk social movements and organizations emerge? (2) Why do people participate in such movements and organizations?

Different levels of abstraction and varying levels of theory yield distinct "explanations" for collective action, of which high-risk social movements and organizations are particular instances.⁵ Theories operating at different levels of abstraction are generally presented in competition with other "schools" or "paradigms," although, often, "competing" theories present more of a contest between "most important variables" than between more profound paradigmatic differences. Rather than insist on the uniform predominance of micro, meso, macro, *or* "supra" macro variables or on variables emphasizing human agency *or* structural and conjunctural variables, the richness of social movement theories provides the possibility of improving explanations for social movements by reference to *composite causal contingencies* (Lofland 1996). In short, explanations for collective action involve multiple variables whose influence in particular instances of collective action is complexly and contingently interrelated.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORIES AND HIGH-RISK COLLECTIVE ACTION

Different social movement theories offer varying answers to the two basic questions posed above. The following overview considers how prevailing

⁴ Recognizing that in comparative historical research there is always a tension between idiographic rigor and nomothetic explanation, a central aim of this article is to provide an initial consideration of how well a careful synthesis of selected theories can account both for the emergence of particular Latin American HROs and for differences among them.

⁵ The social movements literature is replete with competing definitions of "social movement" (leading Marwell and Oliver [1984, p. 4] to conclude "the concept 'social movement' is a theoretical nightmare"). This article adopts a working definition based on Tarrow's (1994, p. 11) conceptualization: "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities." Adopting this definition does not imply that I accept Tarrow's theoretical arguments regarding the sociological *bases* for collective challenges in their entirety.

approaches to these two questions account for the emergence of, and participation in, social movements and organizations *in high-risk contexts*.

Micro-Level Approaches

Approaches based on the premises of methodological individualism focus on the decisions and actions of discrete individuals to explain *why people engage in collective action*. These approaches can be divided into two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) general categories: those that adopt a rational choice framework and those that focus on individual characteristics or psychology to explain motivation.

Focusing attention on individual calculations of the costs and benefits of participation in collective action (Oberschall 1973, 1993; Klandermans 1984), rational choice approaches help explain why individuals participate in some movements but not others, and at some moments but not others, by assessing the changing incentives and disincentives for participation. While accepting Olson's (1965) basic framework, many rational choice theorists have qualified (or relaxed) his assumptions, expanded their analyses from individual to "collective" decision making, and introduced non-material incentives into calculations of cost/benefit ratios (Oliver 1984; Fireman and Gamson 1979; Oberschall 1993). Despite such efforts, both formal and more "relaxed" rational choice models are particularly *unhelpful* for explaining participation in collective action in situations involving high levels of risk or contexts of extreme instability and unpredictability.

Rational choice models work best when the "rules of the game"—the costs and benefits of choosing one action versus another—are clear and predictable (Geddes 1995, p. 87). But many "high-risk" contexts are high risk precisely because the consequences of actions are impossible to predict.⁶ Additionally, it is difficult for rational choice models to avoid tautology when they attempt to incorporate noninstrumental incentives or to explain what Weber ([1992] 1968, p. 25) referred to as "value-rational behavior." In such cases, the "preferences" of actors are often deduced from the very actions they are meant to explain (e.g., Fireman and Gamson 1979, p. 24).

In part, this is because the language and grammar of rational choice tends to obstruct rather than facilitate understanding of human action in contexts where nonmaterial incentives, or "meanings," are *central* to individual decisions. It is analytically useful to distinguish "costs" ("expen-

⁶ The military regimes in Southern Cone countries pursued (to varying degrees) deliberate strategies of seemingly arbitrary and disproportionately cruel forms of repression, creating fear, confusion, and terror with the intention of paralyzing any opposition.

ditures of time, money, and energy required of a person engaged in a particular form of activism") and "risks" ("anticipated dangers of engaging in a particular type of activity") (McAdam 1986, p. 67). However, in the rational choice framework, psychosocial processes such as *fear* are not formally theorized. Hence, risks simply weigh in as potential "costs" in individual calculations. And if risk or cost is calculated as a high probability of "death," while benefit is calculated at a minimal probability of "maintenance of honor" or "respect for human rights," how is this "ratio" to be assessed in the grammar of rational calculation in order to predict the outcome? If the likely result of action is death, rational choice models would predict inaction, unless they determine *ex post facto*, with reference to the individual's behavior, that the first order preference is a certain "value" that requires such a sacrifice. This, of course, is tautological.

Combinations of material and nonmaterial incentives are usually involved in individual decision making, and the reasons for individual participation in social movements may change over time. Different types of social movements, different moments in a movement's development, and different stages and levels of individual participation may be characterized by different combinations of material, solidary, and purposive motivations (Hirsch 1986; Snow et al. 1986). It is possible that at some moments of participation in high-risk social movements, material self-interest may become increasingly important for some participants (i.e., for individuals who become "movement entrepreneurs"); in such instances, a rational choice approach may have considerable explanatory potential. In general, however, it is likely that solidary and purposive motivations usually outweigh material incentives in decisions to participate in high-risk, and especially life-threatening, collective action.⁷

In addition to rational choice approaches, numerous other theories operating at the "micro" level of analysis also focus on individual motivations for participation but offer alternative motivational rationale. Some theorists emphasize how "prosocial" commitments motivate individuals to act collectively to achieve social goals (Martín-Baró 1983). Many "new social movement" (NSM) theorists argue that the expression of "new" or previously unarticulated "identities" forms the basis for collective action. Such approaches may be helpful for explaining participation in contexts of high risk if they avoid essentializing "identity" and instead are sensitive to social processes of identity construction leading up to and in the process of

⁷ See, e.g., Calhoun (1991). Additionally, recent studies emphasizing the role of social networks and processes of collective identity construction suggest that material incentives may be less important determinants of participation than was once thought, even in less risky contexts (Gould 1995; McAdam 1986; Snow and Benford 1992; Snow et al. 1986). Of course, some high-risk collective action is motivated primarily by material incentives.

struggle and how socially constructed "identities" may be threatened by social change.

This contribution of NSM theorists may be linked to approaches that explore how "relative deprivation" or "status strain" may induce participation in social movements (Gurr 1970; Lipset and Raab 1970). The insights of these contributions can be applied to contexts of high risk by considering how sudden social change affects the self-understandings of particular individuals or groups in specific ways. Sudden threats to lifestyle or fundamental values may make life-risking behavior appear like the only viable option—as "self-saving" rather than "self-sacrificing" (Calhoun 1991, p. 69; Weber [1922] 1968, p. 25). Under such conditions, taking high risks may seem "the only choice."

Constructivist Approaches

A recurrent criticism of motivational accounts is that they fail to make problematic the social processes, or "micromechanisms," through which shared grievances or "latent" motivations are translated into collective action. One line of this criticism argues that explanations of participation in collective action need to consider how interactive processes of *interpretation* of grievances influence the propensity to participate (Snow et al. 1986, p. 465). Other theorists emphasize the importance of "identity" to social movements. However, theorists disagree over the extent to which identity *explains*, or is *explained by*, participation in a social movement.

Rather than accepting preexisting identities or feelings of solidarity as causal explanations for participation in social movements, some theorists have emphasized how individual and collective interests, identities, and solidarity are conceived, constructed, maintained, and reproduced in the process of struggle itself (Gould 1995; Melucci 1988; Calhoun 1991; Hirsch 1986; Snow et al. 1986). As Calhoun (1991, p. 52) explains: "The issue of identity is not adequately dealt with in terms of *legitimation*, *expression*, or other terms that imply that it exists prior to and is the basis of a struggle. Identity is, in many cases, forged in and out of struggle, including participation in social movements."

This insight is of particular importance for understanding participation in high-risk social movements, where the nature of the risks taken and sacrifices made are likely to heighten processes of self and collective (re)-definition in ways that have important consequences for continued and intensified participation. While, to the detached observer, the decision to risk life for a cause may appear stupid, pathological, or at best irrational, Calhoun (1991, p. 51) suggests instead that risks may be borne "because participation in a course of action has over time committed one to an identity that would be irretrievably violated by pulling back from risk."

Social Networks

Micromobilization processes are affected by the types of social networks within which potential participants are embedded. This is especially the case for recruitment to potentially risky forms of collective action (McAdam 1986; della Porta 1988; Morris 1984; Laitin 1995). Specifically, as Gould (1995, pp. 203–4) suggests and as McAdam (1986) demonstrates in the case of Freedom Summer volunteers, personal ties such as kinship or close friendship are particularly important for recruitment to high-risk activism. This is supported by Wickham-Crowley's (1989) finding that kinship or patron-client relationships were important bases of recruitment for guerrilla movements in Venezuela, Colombia, and Cuba. Personal ties are particularly important for sustaining contentious collective action in extremely repressive contexts because they provide a foundation for constructing the types of dense and insulated social networks required for effective resistance to state attempts at infiltration. The lack of anonymity also heightens individual accountability and can thus help to prevent defection (Laitin 1995). At the same time, it is within such insulated networks built on ties of kinship and friendship that collective and individual identities are constructed that make life-risking action appear as "self-saving" (Calhoun 1991, p. 69).

In addition to the importance of personal social networks, connections to certain types of organizations or institutions are also consequential for recruitment to high-risk collective action. Local social networks are generally embedded within broader regional, national, and sometimes international institutional networks. Theorists have shown that political parties can be an important basis for recruitment to guerrilla movements (Wickham-Crowley 1989) or terrorist groups (della Porta 1988), both forms of high-risk activism. In certain contexts, linkages to religious institutions, at the local, national, or international level, may also facilitate involvement in high-risk social movements (Wickham-Crowley 1989; Morris 1984; Orellana and Hutchison 1991; Lowden 1996; Osa 1989). The way in which face-to-face social networks are embedded within, and structured by, broader organizational networks influences the likelihood of participation in risky collective action.

Resource Mobilization

Connections to certain types of institutions may also help to explain *when (under what conditions) high-risk social movements and organizations emerge*. As numerous theorists in the "resource mobilization" tradition have convincingly argued, for grievances or beliefs in a cause to be translated into collective action requires availability and access to organizational and other resources (Zald and McCarthy 1979; Tilly 1978; Ob-

erschall 1973). Much like “low-risk” social activists, high-risk activists must have access to basic resources in order to begin and sustain mobilization and act collectively to achieve goals. Institutional and personal linkages to churches (Morris 1984), political parties, labor unions, universities, professional organizations, and national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among others, may provide potential activists in high-risk contexts with resources such as funding, information, and access to physical and symbolic space, which make sustained collective action possible. These sorts of connections frequently provide the “missing links” between feelings of deprivation and injustice, the “interpretation” of these feelings through social networks and processes of identity construction, and contentious collective action.

Frequently, critical resources are provided by “outsiders”—individuals or organizations other than the aggrieved population (Zald and Mayer 1979; Wickham-Crowley 1989). The case studies that follow suggest the acute importance of external financial or material support, information and expertise (services), and access to physical, sociopolitical, and symbolic space for HROs to emerge and be sustained under repressive military dictatorships.

Political Opportunity Structure

Access to resources, existing social networks, and availability of sociopolitical space are not sufficient to account for *when* social movements emerge. To explain the timing of social movement ebbs and flows, theorists have focused on how the political opportunity structure and long-term cycles of protest largely determine the possibility of contentious collective action (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994; Diani 1996). Social movements form in response to changes in society and in the political opportunity structure (Tarrow 1994, p. 18). In Tarrow’s formulation, political opportunity structure is “external” to potential collective actors, so even resource-poor, “weak or disorganized challengers” can take advantage of changing opportunities. External changes may reduce the costs of collective action, reveal potential allies, and expose the vulnerabilities of authorities (Tarrow 1994, p. 18).

Changes in the political opportunity structure may go a long way toward explaining the timing and tactics of high-risk social movements.⁸ However, it may not always be *improvements* in political opportunity that

⁸ The inherent ambiguity of “changes in the political opportunity structure” may also introduce methodological difficulties. “Opportunity” is highly subjective, and “changes” in opportunity are necessarily relative. Looking back, it is possible to see “opportunities” where movement activists saw only “constraints” (and vice versa) (see Tilly 1978, p. 7).

induce social movement participation. In some cases, state policies and actions may themselves *create* new social movement "constituencies." In the cases examined here, political repression and human rights violations created new constituencies in a particularly dramatic and terrible fashion. Thus, while it may be the case that severe state repression tends to correspond with generalized demobilization (Tilly 1978), excessive abuses by the state may *directly stimulate* the emergence of *certain types* of contentious collective action. A basic assumption of opportunity structure and resource mobilization arguments, that "grievances" remain relatively constant, is violated in cases of sudden and severe state repression. The "early risers" in such contexts may mobilize in response to, *not despite*, severe repression; their actions may then create space for later waves of participants who may indeed be responding to *relative* improvements in the structure of opportunities.

In sum, the insights gained from an overview of theoretical literature on social movements suggest that explanations of participation in high-risk collective action should consider the influence of face-to-face, personal social networks, the way in which immediate social networks are embedded within broader institutional networks, and the forging of increasingly committed self and collective identities in the process of participation. Additionally, in contexts of high risk, social movements and organizations are more likely to emerge when individual and institutional networks facilitate access to critical resources such as information, financial assistance, and physical, sociopolitical, and symbolic space from which to launch contentious challenges. As is true for social movements in general, "external" support enhances the possibility for the emergence of social movements and organizations in high-risk circumstances. Finally, repression (a worsening of the political opportunity structure) may induce certain types of collective action.

EMERGENCE OF HROs IN CHILE, URUGUAY, AND ARGENTINA

Despite significant variations in their political histories and socioeconomic systems, the common experience of military dictatorship characterized by extensive human rights violations invites comparison of the HROs that developed in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina in the 1970s and 1980s. Of course there were significant differences between the Southern Cone military regimes, as well as in the character of the military governments over time. The particular historical and institutional role of the military in politics differed in each country. The 1973 coups in Chile and Uruguay interrupted long traditions of civilian rule with only a few brief interludes of military involvement. In Argentina, military intervention in politics was a recurrent historical routine. Southern Cone military governments also

varied in their internal structure, from relatively tight, top-down hierarchical control under General Pinochet in Chile, to interforce (army, navy, air force) divisions in Argentina, to hard-line/soft(er)-line factions in Uruguay. Despite such differences among and within these military governments, they shared a common commitment to national security doctrines that articulated the military's historical mission and duty, as ultimate protector of the "patria" from external and internal threats, to eradicate "subversive" elements from society. In all three cases, repression targeted organizations and individuals with linkages or associations with the left, especially labor unions, political parties, and students; however, in no case were government attacks limited to these sectors.⁹ Evidence suggests communication and collaboration among the military intelligence services across nation-state frontiers, including the sharing of novel torture techniques (*Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales* 1984).

However, the overall repressive strategy of each regime in accomplishing its "mission" varied, from the infamous "dirty war" in Argentina that left as many as 10,000–15,000 people dead or disappeared, to the relatively low number of fatalities but extraordinarily high incarceration and torture rates in Uruguay, where prisons were geared toward psychological torture and systematic destruction of the personality (Weschler 1990). Variations in repressive strategies across countries and over time subjected activists to different sets of risks and constraints in their efforts to create and sustain HROs. Differences existed both in the opportunity structure and the *perception* of risk for human rights activists. Such differences help to account for variations in the participation and timing of HROs in these countries, as the nature and extent of physical and psychological repression confronted by potential participants shaped their perceptions of the risks and opportunities. The timing and extent of legal restrictions on personal liberties and rights also varied across countries.¹⁰ Together with the extent and intensity of repression (see fig. A3 in the appendix), such restrictions provide an indirect measure of the sociopolitical space provided by the "political opportunity structure" at different moments beneath the military regimes in each country.

To compare the political opportunity structure—"dimensions of the political environment that either encourage or discourage people from using collective action" (Tarrow 1994, p. 18)—across countries, this article fo-

⁹ Part of the repression in each country was intended to dismantle labor movements in order to impose neoliberal economic models (see Drake 1996).

¹⁰ Tables listing formal restrictions on political and sociocultural activity in Chile (1973–77), Uruguay (1967–77), and Argentina (1975–76) are available from the author upon request.

cuses on two features of the political environment of particular relevance to potential participants in HROs: (1) the extent and intensity of repression, and (2) formal (legal) restrictions on political and sociocultural space. These two "factors" do not fully operationalize what is meant by the concept "political opportunity," let alone *perceptions* of political opportunity, but together they provide a way to approximate the "space" available in each country and to compare in relative terms the degree of risk confronted by potential participants.

While repressive strategies varied, in all cases HROs emerged in response to sudden and dramatic increases in state abuses of civil and human rights. These were *reactive* social movements, in which human rights activists and constituencies were "created" by the abuses they then sought to end.¹¹ In each country, HROs emerged in contexts characterized by what Corradi, Fagen, and Garretón (1992) refer to as a "culture of fear," where the intentional propagation by a regime of a climate of uncertainty, insecurity, and terror aims to paralyze forms of collective action. Threats of persecution, arrest, torture, disappearance, or assassination of opponents of the regime are meant to create insurmountable obstacles to collective action; they exacerbate existing incentives to free ride.¹² Yet in spite of selective *disincentives* to participate in HROs, such organizations emerged in each of the countries chosen for study.¹³ In this context, how were HROs formed despite both generalized perceptions and actual situations of high risk in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina? What accounts for cross-country variations?

¹¹ Prior to the 1960s, there was only one organization in the Southern Cone explicitly concerned with human rights: the Liga Argentina por los Derechos del Hombre was created in 1937 in response to political persecution that followed the military coup of Uriburu in 1930 (see Veiga 1985, pp. 15–26; Frühling et al. 1989).

¹² Olson's (1965) formulation of the "free rider" problem, with its emphasis on "proportional participation," does not adequately capture the dynamics of collective action in cases where small numbers may be more of an advantage than a liability (see Tarrow 1994, p. 15).

¹³ The existence of "selective *disincentives*" to participate means that the free rider problem was not overcome through Olson's suggested solution of selective incentives for participants. In some ways, however, the creators and early participants in HROs can be conceptualized as analogous to Olson's "privileged group"—the other possible solution to the free rider problem. While referring to a group of individuals who lived with the constant fear of repression and potentially horrific mental and physical abuse as "privileged" is an obvious misnomer, this group played a role analogous to the "privileged group" in Olson's terminology. For reasons to be explored below, they were willing and able to assume the "costs" and risks of defying the military regime in the hope of providing the "public good" of basic respect for human rights.

CHILE

Rapid Formation of HROs during the Height of Repression

Chile is unique among the cases in the extent to which organized moral opposition (Lowden 1996) to the military regime by individuals not directly affected by human rights abuses began and was sustained during the height of repression.¹⁴ How do the theoretical approaches to social movements reviewed above help account for the emergence of HROs during the worst years of repression (1973–76), and how do they help explain why individuals risked their lives to participate in the earliest HROs in Chile?

The literature on the human rights movement in Chile emphasizes that HROs formed in successive generations, with the first wave based in religious organizations, especially the Catholic Church, the second wave primarily composed of family members of victims, and later waves based in political parties or some combination of these three (Orellana and Hutchison 1991).¹⁵ The creators and participants in the first HROs in Chile were predominantly religious leaders of various denominations and professionals, including academics, politicians, social workers, psychologists, and lawyers. The first organizations were formed in collaboration with international human rights and religious organizations under the protective umbrella of the Catholic Church. Immediately after the coup, the United Nations High Committee for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Council of Churches, through its representative to Chile, and representatives from evangelical churches petitioned the junta for permission to create an organization to evacuate the 10,000–15,000 non-Chilean political refugees residing in Chile and threatened by persecution. The National Committee for Aid to Refugees (CONAR) facilitated the safe exodus of approximately 4,000 refugees by 1974 (Lowden 1996, p. 32). An organization to assist Chileans was created in October of 1973. The Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile (COPACHI), which included Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, Lutheran, and various evangelical religious leaders, also emerged during the most intense period of repression. Programs under the auspices of COPACHI aimed at providing legal aid and general assistance to vic-

¹⁴ The literature on HROs in the Southern Cone distinguishes between organizations made up primarily of *afectados* or *victimias*, people personally affected by repression through loss of family member, and organizations of *no-afectados*, people indirectly affected by human rights abuses (although there is some overlap in membership).

¹⁵ Some sources refer to groups of family members of *desaparecidos* and victims of human rights abuses as "movements" and reserve the label "organization" for other types of HROs. Since this does not correspond with predominant usage in the social movement literature and would only add to terminological confusion, I have not adopted this usage.

tims of political persecution and their families, assisting refugees, and helping those hardest hit by the regime's austere economic policies through self-help employment projects, day care centers, and children's soup kitchens (Smith 1982, p. 334). In 1975, COPACHI was dissolved under pressure from the military junta and was replaced by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, which together with La Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias (FASIC) continued to provide crucial support to those affected by repression.

Subsequent waves of HROs, such as organizations of family members of the disappeared, followed by more explicitly antiregime HROs, emerged in the space opened up by earlier organizations (Vidal 1986, pp. 26–33). The programs and strategies of later waves of HROs varied depending on the political context and particular goals but generally included some combination of public denunciation of human rights abuses, legal and material aid for victims and their family members, popular education, and eventually mass mobilization in opposition to the military regime.¹⁶

Several HROs emerged after 1977, as the dictatorship gradually loosened its control over social life, lending support to Tarrow's thesis that changes in the political opportunity structure that reduce the costs or potential risks of organization largely account for the timing of contentious collective action. Tarrow's formulation helps to account for the emergence of these third-generation Chilean HROs, because it recognizes that *relative* improvements in the opportunity structure may incite collective action. However, the earliest Chilean HROs do not fit neatly in Tarrow's model. What insights does the synthetic theoretical framework outlined above shed on why and how HROs emerged and were sustained during the height of repression in Chile?

The most salient feature of the early HROs in Chile, and the one that distinguishes the Chilean human rights movement from the other cases under consideration, is the prominence of the Catholic Church.¹⁷ But the involvement of the Church per se is not itself an *explanation* for the quick and enduring formation of HROs in Chile compared with the more delayed or relatively weaker responses in other cases. A theoretically in-

¹⁶ Tables listing HROs created in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina prior to democratic transition in each country are available from the author upon request. Tables include name, date of origin, principal participants, and primary objectives and activities of each organization.

¹⁷ For the purposes of this article, I consider the consequences of the Catholic Church's position vis-à-vis the military regime for HROs without attempting to explain *why* the Church as institution reacted differently to human rights abuses in each country. Though a fascinating question, it is beyond the scope of the present analysis. For Chile, see Smith (1982). For Argentina, see Mignone (1988).

formed assessment of the emergence of and participation in the earliest HROs in Chile suggests specific ways in which the Church and other religious organizations were influential.

First, accounts of the formation of COPACHI reveal the importance of *preexisting transnational and national social and political networks* linking religious leaders from diverse denominations in the creation of the earliest HROs. In the first months of the dictatorship, characterized by massive disappearances and political repression,¹⁸ the church as an institution did not openly criticize the regime. To the contrary, it lent the military government at least tacit support and hence contributed to its legitimacy.¹⁹ Brian Smith (1982) describes the position of the Church during this period of extreme repression as ambiguous at best, with Silva Cardinal Henriquez, the Permanent Committee of the Episcopal Conference, and several bishops expressing confidence in the regime and counting on the "good faith" of the military junta "as Christians" to bring a rapid end to the repression.²⁰

In the days following the September 11, 1973, coup, a representative of UNHCR, a representative of the World Council of Churches (Charles Harper), and several Chilean ecumenical leaders created CONAR to secure the exit of the large refugee population. Following on the heels of CONAR, COPACHI was created to extend ecumenical support to Chilean nationals. Harper contacted Bishop Helmut Frenz, the head of the Lutheran Church in Chile, who spoke with the auxiliary bishop of Santiago, Fernando Ariztía, who enlisted the support of Raul Cardinal Silva Henriquez, the Archbishop of Santiago. Cardinal Silva Henriquez held a meeting for selected representatives of the Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Baptist churches and the Jewish community, and COPACHI, officially under the jurisdiction of the archdiocese of Santiago, was set in motion (Lowden 1996, p. 32). The *Comité para la Paz*, then, was not a product of the Catholic Church as institution; rather, it

¹⁸ Estimated numbers of disappeared persons vary widely depending on the source. The Chilean Truth Commission, whose estimates are widely recognized as conservative due to its stringent criteria for accepting cases, reports 1,156 deaths and disappearances from September to December 1973. The CIA reported 11,000 dead between September and November 1973, while the U.S. State Department estimates ranged to 20,000 for the same period (cited in Smith 1982, p. 288). For a comparison and analysis of diverse estimates for Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, see King (1989).

¹⁹ Isolated criticisms of "individual aberrances of power" emerged from 1974 onward; however, the Church did not officially criticize the systematic abuse of power by the regime until mid-1976 (see Smith 1982, chap. 9).

²⁰ The Church's official position of good faith toward the "Christian" military junta should be understood in contrast to its discomfort with the preceding Marxist regime that it perceived as a threat to traditional Catholic values (see Smith 1982, chap. 9).

developed through the personal and professional relations of religious leaders and others who, regardless of denomination, shared certain basic life commitments and values and recognized the threat of the regime to those values.

The preexisting social networks of progressive religious leaders also linked them to leftist politicians, university faculty, social workers, lawyers, and other professionals who participated in the first generation of HROs (Camus 1985; Lowden 1996; Orellana and Hutchison 1991). The Chilean case is unique in the extent to which institutional connections between the Church, Catholic left political parties, labor unions, community organizations, and Catholic universities had facilitated the prior development of personal networks linking individuals from these spheres of society. Personal ties were formed through institutional connections and shared values linking students and faculty at the prestigious Catholic University to progressive leaders within the Church, to political leaders, activists, and party members of the Catholic left. Institutional and personal connections between representatives of the Chilean Catholic Church and progressives in the universities and political parties were facilitated by the Church's official identification with the social reformist principles espoused at Vatican II in 1968 and reaffirmed a few years later at Medillín (Smith 1982).²¹

Many political leaders on the left had studied at Catholic universities, met each other through involvement in student politics, and maintained ties with faculty and priests. These networks, sometimes going back to the 1930s, proved crucial, as the individuals who became involved in human rights activities in the early years of the dictatorship through COPACHI, and later through the Vicaría and FASIC, were for the most part Catholics from outlawed or suspended political parties. According to Smith (1982, p. 334), the "backbone of the original core team" who initiated programs under the auspices of COPACHI "were Catholics formerly associated with leftist parties," such as Movimiento de Acción Popular Unitaria (MAPU) and the Christian Left Party (IC). Some non-Catholics who had been active in the communist or socialist parties also volunteered, along with several priests and nuns, totaling over 300 professional and staff personnel working as lawyers, social workers, physicians, and clerical help (Smith 1982, p. 334). Because of the high risks and the importance of trust and solidarity in the early 'wave' of resistance, participants

²¹ The Church's discomfort with the Allende government was much more a reaction to that government's Marxist ideology than its plans for social reform (see interviews and survey results in Smith [1982]). Mainwaring (1986, p. 170) suggests that "since the late 1950s, the Chilean hierarchy has been one of the most progressive in Latin America."

were recruited exclusively through the personal networks of the core members. According to a psychologist active in FASIC, "The first generation of human rights activists was clearly made up of a network of persons who, if they didn't all know each other personally, had faith in the friends of those they did. Nobody came in off the street ('Nadie llegó desde la calle')" (Lira 1997).

Whether for primarily religious, ethical, or political reasons, some degree of personal commitment and "solidarity" (Fireman and Gamson 1979; Martín-Baró 1983) toward confronting the abuses of the regime characterized the early participants in HROs. Those who began to organize during the first wave, in the midst of unprecedented political repression and state terror, were motivated to do so in part because of moral, personal, and political commitments developed in their life experiences prior to the coup. Preexisting ties and solidarity among certain religious leaders, academics, politicians, and professionals (e.g., lawyers, social workers) facilitated the formation of COPACHI.

As outlined above, recent theories suggest that, to understand why individuals risked their lives by engaging in human rights work in the early to mid-1970s in Chile, it is helpful to consider both participants' self understanding and commitments prior to their involvement and how their "sense of self" is affected by involvement in high-risk collective action (Calhoun 1991, p. 69). Calhoun's (1991, p. 51) suggestion that risks may be borne "not because of the likelihood of success in manifest goals but because participation in a course of action has over time committed one to an identity that would be irretrievably violated by pulling back from risk" is supported by the account of a psychologist working with FASIC who became deeply involved in human rights activism: "In my view, motivations to participate were ethical, political, and very personal. For me, the suffering of the people I was helping was intolerable, the persecution of my students, their disappearance and death still cause me pain today. I believe that one commits oneself to things because of who one is. I believe that I would have lost my own dignity and self-respect if I hadn't done the work I did" (Lira 1997).

Once involved in the daily activity of assisting victims of human rights abuses and their families, saving lives by coordinating asylum for targets of persecution, and helping subjected communities to meet their basic needs, participants became increasingly committed to what Martín-Baró (1983) refers to as "prosocial" collective action and identity, in which commitment to the community or greater good of society outweighs concern for individual needs or satisfactions. As the FASIC psychologist notes: "For many people on the left who were unemployed, it was work. For others, it was a cause, a meaning of life. And if that's how it is, risks lose their importance" (Lira 1997).

The tight personal networks that made up the first generation of HROs were relatively effective and sustainable during the most intense period of repression (1973–76) because they were embedded within extended organizational networks that included the Catholic Church; as a nexus linking immediate social networks of committed individuals to those in need of assistance, the Church as institution played an invaluable role. The “politically neutral” Church organizations provided a degree of symbolic and physical space within which religious leaders, political activists from banned political parties, and concerned professionals could meet and coordinate assistance for victims of persecution or repression.

In addition to organizations explicitly focused on human rights, the Church also facilitated or sponsored a plethora of NGOs, including research institutes such as the Academia de Humanismo Cristiano, which housed professors purged from the universities by the government (Vidal 1986). Along with the Church’s own information gathering and publications (Garretón 1983, p. 179; CEP 1974²²) those of the Academia became an important source of information and “counterinformation” in combating government censorship. Because of the breadth of the Church’s ties to Chilean society, expanded further under the dictatorship as it increasingly served as a “surrogate” for outlawed forms of organization, the Church’s “organizational network offered a unique opportunity to work for human rights” (Smith 1982, p. 334). The particular way that personal networks reflecting the institutional linkages in Chilean society were embedded within the Church partly explains why and how certain individuals managed to organize HROs in the first months after the coup.

The embeddedness of personal networks of committed activists within the domestic and international institutional networks of the Church also accounts in part for Chilean HROs’ ability to inspire and coordinate international resistance to the Pinochet regime. The embedded networks facilitated the development of an elaborate, clandestine web connecting grassroots activists in Chile to high-level international Church officials, to private and government foundations, to Chilean exiles living abroad. Through these channels, many individuals whose lives were threatened under Pinochet were smuggled out of Chile. These networks also helped to sustain political activity of the Chilean exile community trying to influence international opinion of the Pinochet regime. Although human rights activists from Argentina, and to a lesser extent Uruguay, also testified intermittently in international forums, the Chilean activists were exceptional

²² For a fascinating collection exemplifying the type and extent of “counterinformation” being produced within the Church, see CEP (*Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones* 1974).

in their ability to sustain a veritable international political lobby over a considerable period of time.

The Church as institution was also influential in that even before it began to make official its opposition to the military junta, its historical and institutional role in Chilean society was crucial in providing a shield of legitimacy behind which the early HROs were able to coordinate assistance for victims of persecution. The Catholic Church in Chile had been deeply and directly involved in politics since colonial times and in numerous ways remained extremely influential in the moral, social, and political life of Chilean society after the separation of Church and state in 1925 and throughout the decades leading up to the coup in 1973 (Smith 1982).

In its first year in power, the military junta did not wish to risk an open attack on the "humanitarian work" of COPACHI, for fear of risking a confrontation with the Church hierarchy, which might undermine its legitimacy in the eyes of Chileans and in the international community. While not immune to persecution, the work carried out openly under the auspices of COPACHI escaped direct repression, at least for a while. However, toward the end of 1974, COPACHI volunteers and programs began to be targets of government harassment.²³ The implication of a group of priests and nuns linked to COPACHI in procuring asylum for four members of the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) in foreign embassies led to the arrests of several religious members of COPACHI in November of 1975. Pinochet accused COPACHI of providing a front for Marxist-Leninist agitators and, in a letter to the cardinal, he requested that it be disbanded (Smith 1982, p. 318). Although the cardinal acquiesced, formally ending the interdenominational *Comité para la Paz*, the following month he created a new organization, the *Vicariate of Solidarity* (*Vicaría de la Solidaridad*), which essentially took up where COPACHI had left off. According to Smith (1982, p. 318):

While there were some changes in personnel, the new organization continued the same services of COPACHI and was made an integral part of the juridical structures of the Archdiocese of Santiago. While the Church had lost a tactical skirmish with the government, the strategy of the cardinal was shrewd and foresighted. The new Vicariate of Solidarity was more closely tied to the official Church than its predecessor, making it both easier for the bishops to control and harder for the government to smash without directly attacking the core of the Church itself.

The Church as institution provided a "moral shield" for human rights work through its domestic influence as a source of legitimacy and its international symbolic, moral, and political weight. These characteristics of

²³ See Smith's (1982, p. 317) account of "paid spies" attending Church activities.

the Church also made it logistically possible for foreign religious and humanitarian foundations to send money in support of human rights activities without state interference. CONAR and COPACHI benefited from foreign funds from their first moments, as Bishop Frenz arranged for support from the World Council of Churches through his relationship with a member of the council, pastor Charles Harper. Other evangelical and Catholic organizations in Western Europe and the United States, as well as the Inter-American Foundation and the Ford Foundation, beginning in 1974, also made significant contributions (Frühling 1988, p. 149).

The significance of external financing of the Chilean HROs is difficult to overestimate. Smith (1982, p. 325) argues that "none of the new projects begun under the auspices of the Chilean Church since 1973 could have been inaugurated or sustained over time without very considerable outside support." Based on data provided by donating organizations, Smith calculated that between 1974 and 1979 over \$67 million in financial and material assistance was sent to the Chilean Church from Catholic organizations in North America and Western Europe. The Inter-American Foundation contributed approximately \$20 million in grants to Church-sponsored projects. And contributions from North American and Western European Protestant organizations, funneled through the World Council of Churches, totaled approximately \$10 million (1982, p. 326). As Smith points out, these funds dwarfed the Chilean Church's \$4 million in internal resources collected through "tithing campaigns" during this same period. Though the military government attempted on various occasions to obstruct the flow of external funds to the Chilean Catholic Church, it repeatedly backed down in response to international pressure from the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, and in the case of Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funds, members of the U.S. Congress, the U.S. ambassador, and representatives of the IDB (Smith 1982, pp. 327-29). Embedded within influential organizational networks at the international level, the Chilean Catholic Church was able to serve as a funnel for foreign funds for human rights programs, even when the Pinochet regime was willing to risk some domestic confrontation with the Church.

As suggested by resource mobilization approaches in the social movement literature, access to external funding or other resources is frequently crucial for explaining why social movements emerge precisely when they do and are able to sustain themselves over time. It is quite clear to observers and participants in the Chilean human rights movement that foreign funding facilitated both the implementation and the sustainability of human rights programs in Chile and that such funding was both forthcoming and technically possible due largely to Church sponsorship of HROs and their varied activities in Chile (Smith 1982; Lowden 1996).

The "framing" of human rights programs as such also facilitated the moral and technical support of international organizations tied into the international human rights issue network (Sikkink 1993). As indicated earlier, almost immediately after the coup, the UNHCR and the World Council of Churches intervened on behalf of the 10,000–15,000 political refugees residing in Chile. International organizations were thus involved in Chile from the first day after the coup and were not slow to spread the word of massive abuses of human rights. In the first six months after the coup, delegations from Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists made visits to Chile to examine the human rights situation. The international publicity and uproar over the abuses committed by the military government immediately following the coup were channeled into an effective political lobby by international HROs and the Chilean exile community, which pressured the U.S. government to pressure the Pinochet regime to halt abuses.²⁴

The combination of foreign funds and international visibility helps to account in part for the sustainability of the first generation of HROs in Chile despite a political opportunity structure that was not conducive to sustained collective action. In the absence of "externally determined" advantageous fluctuations in the structure of political opportunities (Tarrow 1994), resourceful social actors sought out and *created* "opportunity"—through personal networks embedded in historically linked social, political, and institutional networks—where none seemed forthcoming. From there, the emergence of later waves of HROs and the eventual mass mobilization to oppose the continuation of Pinochet in power (1988), and later in the struggle for "truth" and "justice" in the transition to democracy, followed more closely Tarrow's conceptualization of increasing mobilization in response to improvements in the political opportunity structure.

Yet while the political opportunity structure, as captured by the intensity and extent of repression (see figs. A1 and A3 in the appendix) and restrictions on personal liberties and rights,²⁵ did not seem conducive to the emergence of collective action in defense of human rights between 1973 and 1976 in certain respects some Chileans enjoyed a somewhat greater degree of personal freedom in the first years after the coup than in Uruguay or Argentina. Repression peaked in Chile between 1973 and 1976. During and after 1976, arrests and disappearances were more selective than in either Uruguay or Argentina, and there were fewer "errors"

²⁴ A somewhat perverse indicator of the success of the publicity campaign to isolate the Pinochet regime in the international community is that several members of the Argentine armed forces have explained their decision to employ clandestine repressive measures as a means to avoid Pinochet's difficulties with international critics (see Sikkink 1993, p. 423).

²⁵ See n. 10 above.

or “unintended” detentions or murders (in part due to the international publicity mentioned above). For the most part, individuals recognized who the targets of persecution would be and why; this provided some minimal level of day-to-day security, if only for those who fell outside the ascriptive social categories persecuted by the state.

Significantly, in comparative perspective, some social spaces remained open, if constrained, in Chile, that were eliminated either before or upon the military coming to power in Argentina and Uruguay. Though political activity was proscribed, right and center political parties, including the Christian Democrats, were not outlawed until 1977. Some newspapers, including the generally conservative *El Mercurio*, continued to operate without prior censorship, and most social organizations of a nonpolitical nature were allowed to continue to function. Although they were not viable sites for open *political* resistance to the regime, these social spaces allowed people to meet, talk, and develop shared understandings of the situation.

Of course, the relative selectivity of state persecution and the limited availability of certain social spaces would not qualify, by Tarrow’s own definition, as aspects of the political opportunity structure that *encouraged* collective action; from Chileans’ perspective, these features resulted from sudden changes in the political environment that drastically increased the costs and risks of contentious collective action, which in Tarrow’s formulation should *discourage* the emergence of social movements. However, the potential “opportunities” of these features of the political environment may be seen as such when considered in comparative perspective, as will become evident below.

Conclusion

Analyzing the emergence of HROs in Chile within a synthetic theoretical framework suggests that such an approach can improve understanding of the interrelated social processes involved in the emergence of social movements and organizations in high-risk contexts. In lieu of considering either a single “most important variable,” or what amounts to a check-off list of hypothetically independent variables operating discretely at distinct levels, this approach sheds light on how several processes discussed in the social movement literature are *interrelated* in particular ways in a historically specific case.

In Chile, certain individuals chose to participate in HROs despite the risks because of moral, personal, religious, social, or political commitments developed prior to the coup and because of preexisting personal connections linking them to others with similar commitments. Once involved, their personal and collective sense of commitment was increased through

the experience of participation. These face-to-face networks, which reflected the institutional networks between the Catholic Church, Catholic University, Catholic left political parties, labor unions, and professional organizations, were embedded within the broader institutional networks of the Church and transnational NGO and religious networks. These networks permitted the rapid emergence and sustainability of HROs during the height of repression by facilitating almost immediate access to international funding and publicity and by providing the symbolic and moral legitimacy and the physical and sociopolitical space from which to coordinate programs in defense of human rights from the first moments after the coup.

URUGUAY

The Absence of HROs during the Height of Repression

Uruguay presents a striking contrast to Chile. Although the *autogolpe* in Uruguay occurred the same year as the Chilean coup,²⁶ the first and only HRO to operate as such under the dictatorship did not emerge until 1981 (Frühling, Alberti, and Portales 1989, p. 262; Weschler 1990, p. 154).²⁷ What requires explanation in the Uruguayan case, then, is the *absence* of HROs in the first seven years under the military regime.²⁸

The Chilean case suggests the importance of access to resources such as funding, information, and sociopolitical or symbolic space, to account for the *timing* of emergence and sustainability of HROs in high-risk contexts. Additionally, it reveals that participation in collective action in high-risk contexts depends on particular types of face-to-face networks, the way in which immediate social networks are embedded within broader institutional networks, and the forging of increasingly committed self and collective identities in the process of participation. In the Chilean case, a particular configuration of these factors facilitated a rapid and sustained response by particular actors whose activities created additional space for subsequent waves of activists, whose mobilization corresponded to relative improvements in the political opportunity structure. The Uruguayan case provides the opportunity to assess how well this same combination

²⁶ The Uruguayan armed forces denied that a coup had taken place in Uruguay in 1973, when the National Congress was dissolved, because the elected president, Bordaberry, retained the office of chief executive. They place the date of the coup three years later, on June 12, 1976, when Bordaberry was forced to resign.

²⁷ See n. 16 above.

²⁸ To my knowledge, no one has explored why HROs formed so much later in Uruguay than in Chile during this period. Of course, the absence of collective action is the expected outcome for those who follow Mancur Olson (1965).

of factors accounts for the *absence* of the outcome they explain in the Chilean case.

Uruguayan and Chilean societies were similar in several important respects prior to the early 1970s. Each enjoyed a highly developed political party system, national labor unions, a large urban population, a prestigious education system, and a long electoral tradition with only a few brief interruptions.²⁹ In one important way, however, Chile and Uruguay could scarcely have been more different. The secular nature of Uruguayan society contrasted sharply with the permeation of religion and the Church in most all spheres of Chilean life, from education to politics. Uruguay is widely recognized as an extremely secular society, in which the Church has little influence outside a clearly demarcated and limited "religious" sphere. This contrasts with the Chilean Catholic Church's long history of strong political and social influence, which in recent decades had been exerted increasingly toward social reform. The Church in Uruguay has been "historically weak" and "has never assumed the defense of the persecuted or oppressed" (Gauding 1991, p. 86). The Church in Uruguay also lacked strong historical connections to the major political parties or labor organizations. The largest party in Uruguay, the Colorados, was ardently secular, even anticlerical, in contrast to Chile's most important political party, the Christian Democrats. When compared with the Chilean case, a theoretically informed consideration of this feature of Uruguayan society provides several insights that help to account for the absence of HROs in Uruguay until the political climate shifted following the plebiscite in 1980.

First, and perhaps reflecting the isolated and limited role of the Church in national political life, neither the Catholic Church nor other religious institutions were able to provide the kind of protective moral "shield" from direct persecution that COPACHI depended upon during the first months of the Pinochet regime. Whereas COPACHI's affiliation with the Church warded off (at least for a while) direct persecution by the military regime,³⁰ the Uruguayan armed forces openly confronted the Church *as institution* in their first years in power. In the years of armed struggle between the armed forces and *Tupamaro* guerrillas, which lead up to the *autogolpe*, several prominent members of the Uruguayan Bishop's Conference, including the archbishop of Montevideo, espoused increasingly progressive

²⁹ Due to its democratic legacy, large middle class, and commitment to a welfare state, Uruguay had earned the international reputation of the "Switzerland of Latin America." In specialists' rankings of "political development" in Latin America prior to the seventies, Uruguay is generally ranked first among Latin American countries, with Chile following close behind. See, e.g., Fitzgibbon (1954).

³⁰ Smith (1982, p. 312) suggests that regime's initial tolerance of COPACHI was a trade off for the acquiescence of the Church hierarchy during the first year after the coup.

views reflecting support of the principles of Vatican II and Medellín.³¹ In 1969, and again in 1972, the Bishop's Conference issued letters that, despite their overall neutral tone and calls for "reconciliation," offered subtle critiques of the increasing use of torture and unjust imprisonment (Kaufman 1979, p. 45; Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America 1978, p. 15). President Bordaberry's response to the 1972 letter essentially dismissed the bishops' concerns. In part, he replied: "In this struggle, conventional standards are not applicable. . . . Information is a decisive factor, it is the basis of success. . . . Information is obtained in some instances spontaneously . . . and in others after rigorous interrogations. I defend the rigor and the severity of interrogations, which avoid bloodshed and deaths in this war, and which make possible bloodless victories."³²

Following the *autogolpe* in 1973, which sparked protests by unions and student organizations and resulted in massive arrests, the Church maintained a position of official silence (Rama 1987, p. 175). But as Uruguayans were soon to learn, neutrality was not an option in the generals' Uruguay. The Church's official silence was interpreted as a failure to cooperate with the military government, and the Church was considered infiltrated by communism "whose ruinous villainous and treasonous actions must be once and forever expurgated" (General Forteza in *La Opinión*, September 29, 1973; quoted in Kaufman 1976, p. 46). According to General Forteza, international communism "has reached the Church itself, violating in this institution the rights and obligations that the State has granted to the different religions" (Forteza in *La Opinión*, September 29, 1973; quoted in Kaufman 1976, p. 54).

In contrast to the church-state relationship under military rule in Chile, in Uruguay, not only were the Church and other religious institutions perceived as subordinate to the state, the Church was accused of violating the conditions of its existence as determined by the state. This is clear in the open verbal attacks on the Church as institution,³³ as well as in the

³¹ Several prominent members of the Church hierarchy also defended the traditional, conservative role of the Church; overall, the Uruguayan Church was (by default) more progressive than in Argentina but much less so than in Chile. Mainwaring (1986, p. 115) suggests that Argentina and Uruguay are exceptional among Latin American Roman Catholic Churches in that they failed to become more progressive in the repressive situations of the 1970s.

³² *Ahora*, June 16, 1972 (cited in Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America 1978, p. 15).

³³ While the Pinochet government criticized particular members of the Church on numerous occasions, it avoided verbal attacks on the legitimacy of the Church as institution.

persecution and arrests of numerous religious functionaries. In addition to the arrest, torture, and, in some cases, death of individual Methodists and members of Catholic orders (such as Jesuits and Dominicans), the regime also created an official commission to investigate Catholic Church activities (Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America 1978, p. 51). According to the former auxiliary bishop of Montevideo, Andrés Rubio: "The Uruguayan police tentatively watches the Catholic Church, controls and watches the content of sermons in the churches and investigates the text of the material circulated; several parishes and houses of clergymen have been subjected to searches and some priests have been arrested" (in the Mexican newspaper *Excelsior*, June 21, 1975; quoted in Kaufman 1979, p. 81).

Largely due to its relative isolation from the political process and historically marginal position in other spheres of Uruguayan society, the generals did not feel obligated even to feign respect for the Church. With members and leaders subject to arrest and imprisonment, the Church as institution could not provide "protected spaces" to the extent that it could in Chile, nor could it effectively perform the role played by the Chilean Church of collecting and disseminating "counterinformation." In Chile, the historical, political, and symbolic importance of the Church as institution forced the military junta to adopt a more cautious stance toward the Church, allowing it to become the single most important locus of resistance and moral opposition to the military regime. In Uruguay, the Church was much more easily controlled and repressed by the generals; it may well have been the "weakest of all political pressure groups in the country" (Kaufman 1979, p. 81).

While numerous sectors of "civil society" in precoup Uruguay were highly organized, the *particular type* of cross-sectoral personal networks that made such a difference in Chile were lacking. The contrast between the relationship of the church and the political left in Chile and Uruguay is particularly striking. Until quite recently, the left was historically insignificant as a political force in Uruguay, and the Christian left even more so. The two major political parties in Uruguay were both secular; the traditional Colorado and Blanco parties had monopolized political control through an elaborate electoral system and power-sharing arrangement that guaranteed the "loser" (for most of this century, the Blancos) one-third of the seats in legislative bodies. In the 1966 elections, the Christian Democratic Party won a mere 3% of the votes, and all leftist parties together accounted for only about 10% of the votes (Franco 1984, p. 95). With the formation of the Frente Amplio, a leftist coalition including the Socialist Party, the Frente Izquierda, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Union Popular, among other (even) smaller parties, the combined

votes for the left in the 1971 elections rose to 18.28%, but the Christian Democratic Party still claimed only 3.86% of the electorate (Franco 1984, p. 95).

Whereas in Uruguay no significant Christian Democratic Party had developed prior to the *autogolpe*, in Chile before the coup, the Christian Democrats had governed from 1964 to 1970 and remained the country's single most powerful electoral force; the Christian left was an important if small part of the Allende coalition. In Chilean municipal and parliamentary elections since 1963, the Christian Democrats had received more votes than any other single party, and combined with the socialist and communist parties, claimed over 50% of votes in all elections through 1973 (Bravo Lira 1978, p. 203). In contrast to the 3% of votes won by the Christian Democrats in Uruguay in 1971, the Chilean Christian Democrats earned 25.72% of total votes in municipal elections the same year and 29.12% in the parliamentary elections two years later (Bravo Lira 1978).

The comparatively low support for the Christian Democratic Party in Uruguay, yet another indicator of the secular nature of Uruguayan society, reflects the historically low level of interconnectedness and ideological affinity between the Church, political parties, and labor organizations.¹⁴ Institutional linkages between the Church and the most prestigious universities, where the political and professional elites were predominantly educated, were also lacking. In contrast to Chile, where Catholic and secular higher education are both esteemed, in Uruguay the production of future political leaders, lawyers, academics, psychologists, doctors, and social workers occurred almost exclusively in public, secular universities. Political leaders were not influenced by Catholic education, nor had they participated together along with other would-be professionals in Catholic youth groups, as was often the case in Chile since the 1920s. Hence, another crucial link in the type of face-to-face networks that were so consequential in Chile was missing in Uruguay. The lack of institutional linkages between Church, universities, and political parties in Uruguay suggests that even if the Church had been able and willing to provide a relatively secure space for coordinating efforts in defense of human rights following the *autogolpe*, it would have had few "secure" channels through

¹⁴ Writing in 1964, Goran G. Lindahl commented: "The Catholic party, the Unión Cívica, has never gained much support, not only because Uruguay is probably the most atheistic country in Latin America, but possible also because Batlle [the country's most important political leader in the early 20th century] was strongly anti-Catholic: he said that the Catholic religion, like all other religions, was filthy. Today Batlle's son, who runs his old newspaper, *El Día*, goes on writing 'god' without a capital letter. The Unión Cívica has not even been able to gather many of the Catholic voters, most of whom seem to vote for the Nationalists" (Lindahl 1964, p. 450).

which to recruit participants from other sectors of society without the risk of infiltration from security forces.⁵⁵

The Church's weak position in Uruguayan society helps to explain why the types of individuals who became involved through personal networks in the first generation of HROs in Chile—religious leaders and functionaries, party members from the Christian left, academics, lawyers, and social workers—did not create HROs in Uruguay in the face of military dictatorship. However, it only partly accounts for why no organizations emerged at all: Why did no other social actors, perhaps embedded in distinct types of social networks from those that linked the Chilean activists, act collectively to form HROs prior to the 1980s in Uruguay?

Though a reasonable question, the answer is rather obvious. In the Chilean case, *particular types* of social networks, embedded in the multidimensional organizational networks of the Church, were *key* for launching a quick and sustained collective effort in defense of human rights because other potential spaces, particularly political parties, the labor movement, the universities, and professional associations, were restricted following the coup in 1973. This was true to an even greater extent in Uruguay, where traditional spaces for both political and nonpolitical organization were rapidly and systematically eliminated or brought under military control. Uruguayans experienced “the systematic destruction of all the spaces (*ambitos*) that surrounded the State, or that developed autonomously and that could effectively, or eventually, contend for power, information, or cultural production, as well as [military] intervention or mediation in all intermediate forms of social organization that could possibly, regardless of intentions or objectives, become spaces of refuge for the persecuted or those excluded from power” (Rama 1987, pp. 169–70).

Consideration of the nature and extent of repression in Uruguay can largely account for why other social actors, embedded in diverse secular social networks, failed to coordinate and sustain HROs prior to 1981. To an even greater extent than the other countries under consideration, Uruguayan society was thoroughly and deeply penetrated by the monitoring and repressive apparatus of the military state.

Both geography and demography (over 50% of the population lives in the capital city of Montevideo) contributed to the armed forces' social control capabilities. According to the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, “Uruguay was the closest approximation in South America of the Orwellian totalitarian state. A small and demographically

⁵⁵ This was a danger even for the Chileans; however, in an interview with the author, a psychologist with FASIC commented that despite three separate attempts by security forces to infiltrate the Vicaría, they never succeeded because (in a situation where “nadie llegó desde la calle”) they were always identified as outsiders.

homogeneous country, without internal geographical barriers, Uruguay became a laboratory for the national security state" (Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights 1985, p. 51).³⁶ An important difference from Chile is that the foundations and infrastructural skeleton of this "laboratory" were already in place prior to the disbanding of the Uruguayan congress in 1973. In Uruguay, as in Argentina, the armed forces had confronted real and violent "internal enemies" (the Tupamaros and Montoneros, respectively) before coming to power. As a consequence, the security forces were already organized and mobilized for waging a broadened "war against subversion,"³⁷ and important "wartime" legal restrictions on the population were already in effect when the military took control of the state.³⁸ In contrast to Argentina, the armed forces in Uruguay eschewed a clandestine "dirty war" strategy of massive "disappearance" and physical elimination of "subversives" (see table A1 in the appendix); instead, they enforced severe legal restrictions of individual freedoms and "legally" subjected thousands of Uruguayans to a prison system designed to systematically destroy individual personality through physical and psychological torture (Weschler 1990, pp. 131-47; Amnesty International 1983).³⁹

In contrast to Chile, in Uruguay most potential spaces for organized resistance had already been restricted or eliminated before 1973. Although the repression in the first moments after the coup in Chile was severe, in comparative perspective, the Chilean security forces were not as prepared "logistically" (e.g., clandestine torture centers were not already established and fully functioning, the DINA [intelligence agency] had only just been created) to systematically persecute and paralyze all opposition from every sector of civil society as were their counterparts in Uruguay. When compared to Uruguay, it seems plausible that the confusion that followed the coup in Chile—both within civil society as well as within the armed

³⁶ The extent of social control is illustrated by the creation of a computerized classification system designating all public employees as "A" for politically "clean," "B" if involved in "some dissident political activity but capable of rehabilitation," or "C"—"banned." This system resulted in massive firings and facilitated identification of "inactive subversives."

³⁷ Evidence that security forces were organized and in operation prior to 1973 is provided by a report issued in 1969 by a senate named Special Investigative Commission of the Violation of Human Rights, Torture of Prisoners and Conditions of Detention Afflicting Human Dignity. The report includes testimonies of torture victims, coroners, public defenders, and lawyers. See *Acts of the Uruguayan Senate-II-7, Information documentaire d'Amerique Latine* (INDAL), Belgium: 247-82 (cited in Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America 1978, p. 4).

³⁸ See n. 10 above.

³⁹ The main prison under the military was called, ironically, *Libertad*. Prisons were methodically designed, with the assistance of psychologists, to "demolish the mental, emotional and moral integrity of their inmate populations" (Weschler 1990, p. 131).

forces—regarding what had happened and what would happen in the months ahead left some spaces open and conducive to the coordination of collective resistance immediately following the coup. In short, the political opportunity structure in Uruguay was even less favorable for the creation of HROs than in Chile in 1973.

Observers of the repression in Uruguay emphasize that the breadth and depth of military involvement in all spheres of life, and the *extent* of state repression, was unmatched by other Southern Cone regimes. Though the statistical comparisons of deaths and disappearance under the Southern Cone dictatorships make the Uruguayan dictatorship seem relatively benign (see appendix table A1), these numbers are misleading as indicators of the extent of repression because the generals in Uruguay opted for a different repressive strategy: massive arrests, torture, prolonged imprisonment, and intervention in all spheres of life, public and private (*Servicio Paz y Justicia* 1989, chap. 3).⁴⁰ Under the military government, Uruguay had the highest concentration of political prisoners in the world. In 1976, Amnesty International estimated that “one in every 500 inhabitants of Uruguay was in prison for political reasons and that one in every fifty citizens had been through a period of imprisonment, which for many included interrogation and torture” (Amnesty International 1983, p. 1). The Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights (1985, p. 52) estimates that one in every 47 Uruguayans was “subjected to some form of repression during the dictatorship, whether in the form of house arrest, torture, beatings or a house raid.” These numbers earned Uruguay the reputation of the “great lockup.”⁴¹ And though arrests generally targeted certain sectors of society (such as members of political parties, unions, and student organizations), due to the broad definition and interpretation of what constituted grounds for arrest in the interests of “national security,” no one was immune.⁴² The creation and persecution of “thought crimes” through laws that prescribed prison sentences for “the *intention* to commit a crime” or “to damage the honor of the armed forces” or otherwise threaten the nation, meant that anyone could be arrested without any

⁴⁰ The military intervened directly in all public administrations, universities, unions, and professional associations.

⁴¹ The extraordinarily high numbers of exiles during this period is another indicator of the extent of repression. An estimated 300,000 people fled Uruguay in this period, including an estimated one-third of the population between the ages of 20 and 35 (Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights 1985, p. 4). For comparative estimates see Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America 1978, p. 9; King 1989.

⁴² Victims included priests, nuns, high school and university students, teachers, professors, journalists, lawyers, political party members, union leaders and members, and even medical workers (*Servicio Paz y Justicia* 1989, chap. 5).

legal recourse. Lawyers who defended those accused of such crimes were considered to be ideologically sympathetic to their clients and therefore also subject to arrest.⁴³ Hence, the Uruguayan generals' strategy effectively instilled a paralyzing culture of fear (Corradi et al. 1992) throughout society, and deep intervention by the military in all spheres of life closed off potential spaces for the emergence of HROs.

When the defeat of the generals' constitutional referendum in 1980 created temporary openings in the political opportunity structure, one HRO did emerge. Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ)-Uruguay, created in 1981, "was the first organization devoted to work on behalf of the victims of repression and poverty to be established in Uruguay since the advent of the dictatorship" (Frühling et al. 1989, p. 262). In the same spirit as its sister organizations operating in Argentina since 1974 and Chile since 1977, SERPAJ-Uruguay sought to raise consciousness about human rights abuses (grassroots education programs), document human rights abuses committed by the military government, provide economic assistance for medical treatment for victims, and assist returned exiles. It also coordinated groups of family members of disappeared and political prisoners. However, the Christian-humanist organization, led by Perez Aguirre (who was arrested several times and released largely in response to international pressure; see Weschler 1990, p. 155) was severely limited in its efforts by a lack of external funding.

Here, another crucial role played by the Church in Chile again provides an important contrast; the Chilean Catholic Church made it logistically possible for international foundations to send financial support for humanitarian projects. In Uruguay, there was no institutional "funnel" through which funds could be "anonymously" received and diffused. According to a representative of a Swedish ecumenical NGO that funded several human rights programs in Latin America: "SERPAJ received a series of offers of economical support from foreign sources. However, it had to refuse in almost all cases because there was no way to introduce the resources into the country. Several people returning to Uruguay offered to take part and deliver money personally, but the founders [of SERPAJ] did not want to risk their safety" (Gauding 1991, p. 87). A member of SERPAJ-Uruguay commented, "I remember that when I was outside Uruguay people used to ask me, 'how can we send money to Uruguay?'" There wasn't a single person who dared to receive a check, to give to a

⁴³ The fact that lawyers in Uruguay who defended those accused by the regime were themselves criminalized (which occurred to some extent in Argentina as well) undermined any possibility that the legal system might provide some recourse for the persecuted. On lawyers under the military in Uruguay, see Kaufman (1979, p. 77).

family member of a political prisoner, for fear of being sent to La Libertad prison" (as quoted in Gauding 1991, p. 87).

Conclusion

Unlike the other cases examined in this article, the Uruguayan case conforms quite neatly with sociological and commonsense expectations that severe state repression corresponds with generalized demobilization (Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978). Comparative analysis suggests that this is due to the inability of the Church in Uruguay to play a role parallel to that played by the Church in Chile—as “moral umbrella” and as a funnel to capture a large and constant flow of resources—*combined with the regime's repressive strategy*, which effectively obstructed alternative sites of opposition. The combination of theoretical approaches applied to the Chilean case to explain the rapid emergence and sustainability of HROs under Pinochet can also account for the delayed emergence and nonsustainability of HROs in Uruguay. The Argentine case provides the opportunity to assess the utility of this approach to explain a more “intermediate” outcome.

ARGENTINA

An Intermediate Case

Attesting to the value of incorporating multiple cases in comparative research, the Argentine case suggests a challenge to the conclusions drawn from comparison of the Chilean and Uruguayan cases: without the support of the Catholic Church as institution, HROs still emerged under the harshest years of military rule in Argentina. In fact, not only did the Church—a powerful influence in Argentine politics and society—fail to support programs to defend human rights and assist victims of persecution, on numerous occasions it publicly voiced its support for the dictatorship.⁴⁴ Hence, while the Church in Uruguay seemed (at least somewhat)

⁴⁴ As previously mentioned, the reasons for the Argentine Catholic Church's complicity with the dictatorship are beyond the scope of this article. For a concise historical-institutional explanation, see Mignone (1986, pp. 72–92). Illustrative of the Church's complicity, Cardinal Aramburu publicly denied that the disappeared existed and maintained that position despite increasing evidence presented to the bishops by victims' families. According to Lowden (1996, p. 18): “The Episcopal Conference was even silent in the face of the persecution of clergy involved in human rights work, itself of unprecedented proportions: sixteen priests were murdered or ‘disappeared’ and two bishops died under highly suspicious circumstances” (see also Mignone 1988, chap. 2, chap. 8).

willing, but unable, to provide space and support for HROs and the Church in Chile proved both willing and able, the Church in Argentina was able but far from willing. This meant that neither the semiprotective "shield" of symbolic and moral legitimacy nor the multilevel organizational networks of the Catholic Church were available to human rights activists in Argentina. Despite the absence of conditions that were crucial for the emergence of Chilean HROs immediately following the coup, and that account for the absence of HROs in Uruguay until 1981, HROs arose in Argentina during the worst years of repression (1976–79). In the midst of massive and horrific repression in the mid- to late 1970s (see fig. A2 and table A1), and without the protective cover of the Church, why were certain individuals able to organize and act collectively in defiance of the military junta in Argentina? Did these organizations differ in significant ways from those that first emerged in Chile with Church support?

Much like in Chile, the Argentine Catholic Church is a powerful influence in Argentine society and is traditionally a major source of legitimacy for some political leaders.⁴⁵ In contrast, however, the two major political parties in Argentina, the Peronistas and the Radicals, were aggressively secular, if not anticlerical. As in Uruguay, there was no significant Christian Democratic Party and no generational or institutional connections of the Church to major labor, student, and professional associations. Thus, the embedded networks that connected activists to the Chilean Church were largely lacking in Argentina. The complicity of the church with the dictatorship in Argentina closed off what could have been a decisive source of opposition to the abuses of the military junta (Mignone [1986] 1988 p. 21). In stark contrast to the Chilean Church, the Argentine Church aligned itself with the military junta, granting its support and legitimacy to the imposed regime. As in Chile and Uruguay, divergent opinions and attitudes coexisted within the Church hierarchy; but in Argentina, radical and progressive members of the hierarchy were a marginalized minority.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ In fact, in the 1970s, there was still no formal separation of Church and state in Argentina, and the constitution stipulated that the president must be Catholic.

⁴⁶ An organization of radical priests critical of the hierarchy emerged in 1968—the Movement of Priests for the Third World—but it was marginal and, as it earned a reputation of being a socialist organization, fell prey to repression under the 1976 junta (Mainwaring 1986, p. 168). Indicative of the minimal institutional penetration of progressive ideas in the Argentine Catholic Church, Mainwaring suggests that moderates and conservatives within the Argentine hierarchy were unwilling to defend progressive priests or bishops targeted by repression. This is supported in documents presented by Mignone (1988 chap. 8) revealing the collusion of the junta and the conservative hierarchy in the persecution of progressive sectors of the Church (the exact opposite occurred in Chile, where attacks on progressive religious functionaries caused the Church to finally take an official stand in opposition to the regime) (Smith 1982, chap. 9).

The historically conservative hierarchy—which had largely ignored, if not opposed, the social reformist tendencies stemming from Vatican II and Medellín—refused to denounce mounting evidence of human rights abuses, and the majority of churches closed their doors on family members of victims who came to plea for help (Mignone 1988, chap. 2). According to Mignone (1988, p. 19): “The Argentine episcopacy is made up of more than eighty active prelates, including heads of dioceses, auxiliary bishops, and military bishops. Only four of them took a stand of open denunciation of the human rights violations committed by the terrorist regime.” The types of spaces, opportunities, and resources provided by the Church to activists in Chile were not forthcoming to their counterparts from the Church in Argentina.

With the Church doors closed and traditional spaces for organizing and coordinating collective action restricted or eliminated through legal and extralegal measures, HROs in Argentina emerged primarily through non-institutional channels. In addition to the Liga Argentina por los Derechos Humanos, a civil libertarian group dating to 1937 with unofficial links to the Communist Party, three other organizations came onto the scene *prior* to the 1976 coup that established the military dictatorship.⁴⁷ While these HROs emerged in response to repression, they did not initially confront the extent and intensity of repression imposed after 1976 by the military junta. Ecumenical leaders were active in forming all three of them, and two of them operated through personal relations of religious leaders to their parishes. This suggests an important contrast to Uruguay, where (for reasons discussed above) neither the Church—nor much less any other religious organizations—were fertile grounds for the emergence of HROs. Rising numbers of human rights abuses preceded the coup in Argentina because, as in Uruguay, sustained armed conflict between urban guerrillas and the armed forces had led to the erosion of legal protections of individual liberties and rights and to the escalation and institutionalization of extralegal forms of repression.⁴⁸ In response, in 1974, an Argentine section

⁴⁷ See n. 16 above.

⁴⁸ Like the Tupamaros in Uruguay, the Montoneros in Argentina provided justification for increasing military control over Argentine society. While neither the Tupamaros nor the Montoneros posed anywhere near the military threat claimed by the Uruguayan and Argentine armed forces to justify the tactics of their respective “wars against subversion,” they were not “imaginary” enemies either. It is easy, and tempting, to overlook the provocative actions of these urban guerrilla movements in the face of evidence of the horrific abuses committed by the military regimes. But if their repressive actions remain unjustifiable, when the Montoneros were so bold as to wage armed attacks on military barracks, it was not totally unreasonable for the armed forces to speak of an “internal war.” In contrast to Uruguay and Argentina, the Chilean armed forces did not face a significant armed threat before taking power, though smaller armed guerrilla movements later arose in response to the military regime.

of SERPAJ began providing assistance to grassroots sectors suffering effects of the heightened repression. The work of SERPAJ focused primarily on popular education and general assistance for marginalized communities, along with support for the creation of other HROs.

Some ecumenical leaders in Argentina who participated in SERPAJ grew frustrated by its "passive" stance in the face of the suffering they observed among their parishes and broke off to form the *Movimiento Ecu­ménico por los Derechos Humanos (MEDH)* in February 1976, on the eve of the coup. MEDH, which included dissident Catholic clergy and Protestant leaders among its founders, provided direct assistance to victims of human rights abuses and their families. As was the case for CO-PACHI in Chile, a combination of personal networks and external resources was crucial for the formation and activity of MEDH. In an interview, a member of MEDH recalled how "together with some friends, we considered forming a net of solidarity in different parishes to resolve concrete cases" (quoted in Gauding 1991, p. 103). Through mutual friends, members of MEDH were introduced to a representative of *Diakonia*, a Swedish NGO that offered financial assistance. Face-to-face relations were essential, as suggested by another member of MEDH: "In that period, it was impossible to work within any institutional structures. The Swedes ran the same risks as we did. We had to trust each other [*Teniamos que confiar el uno en el otro*]" (quoted in Gauding 1991, p. 103). Along with these two religious-based organizations, the *Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos* was formed by individual religious leaders, lawyers, academics, politicians, and other professionals as an alternative to the *Liga* with its reputed communist sympathies.⁴⁹ The primary activity of the APDH was the collection and systematic documentation of human rights abuses and disappearances. As in Chile, the prior religious, moral, and political commitments of certain individuals embedded in particular face-to-face networks facilitated the formation of HROs, despite severe repression in the mid-1970s in Argentina.

However, there are important differences in the early HROs that emerged in Chile and Argentina. If scholarly discussions of the human rights movement in Argentina rarely focus on the work of these organizations in the first years after the coup, it is only partly because the spotlight was diverted by the emergence of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in 1977, followed by the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* shortly thereafter. It is impressive that without the support of the Church—and at times with its explicit condemnation—HROs formed prior to the coup (before repression dra-

⁴⁹ Like MEDH, the APDH was created through personal networks, since, as Mignone explains (1991, p. 101), individuals formed APDH "without representing—and often against the wishes—of the collectivities to which they belonged."

matically increased) and managed to provide invaluable assistance to victims of human rights abuses and their family members. However, in comparative perspective, their development and activities "were severely limited due to the lack of support from the Catholic Church" (Frühling 1988, p. 161).

The absence of Church support affected these organizations in a number of overlapping ways. For example, in contrast to COPACHI, in their first moments, the activities of both MEDH and APDH were limited by lack of resources (Gauding 1991; Mignone 1991, p. 102). Eventually, both organizations benefited from connections to the World Council of Churches (Brysk 1994, p. 51; Mignone 1991, p. 102), which provided a degree of financial support and, particularly for MEDH, served as an alternative source of moral legitimacy. However, in predominantly (and officially) Catholic Argentina, the moral authority of the World Council of Churches could not offer the degree of protection from direct persecution that programs under the auspices of the Church in Chile enjoyed in the months after the 1973 coup.

During the mid- to late 1970s, the religious leaders involved in SERPAJ and MEDH and the heterogeneous members and leadership involved in APDH provided assistance to victims of repression at great risk to themselves. Brysk's (1994, p. 56) recounting of several cases of persecution of human rights activists is illustrative:

Repression of the human rights movement touched every organization, affecting both the leadership and grass-roots membership. Many members of the original leadership of Las Madres "disappeared," while the Movimiento Ecu­ménico lost two nuns, several priests, and a Protestant minister. The co-founder of the Asamblea . . . was kidnapped, tortured, and imprisoned for several years. . . . Several Liga lawyers disappeared,⁵⁰ and a secretary of the Familiares was kidnapped, tortured, and forced to give false statements to the press denying her disappearance and alleging connections to guerrilla forces. Rank-and-file members of Las Madres were arrested repeatedly following demonstrations. . . . The offices of Asamblea, CELS, La Liga, and Movimiento Ecu­ménico were raided.

Mignone (1991, p. 104) recounts how the meeting places of APDH were bombed on numerous occasions. This repression prevented these organizations from providing nearly the extent of support or protection from state violence that programs under the auspices of the Church in Chile were able to provide in the first months under Pinochet. The absence of the Church umbrella also deprived Argentine HROs of the social and

⁵⁰ Again, this illustrates the less favorable political opportunity structure in Argentina than in Chile, where lawyers were exiled and jailed but none were killed or disappeared.

organizational networks that fostered the emergence, growth, and sustainability of the HROs in Chile. Overall, according to Frühling, in the first few years under the military junta "none of the Argentine human rights organizations reached the level of development or extent of human rights programs comparable to what was occurring in Chile at that time" (Frühling 1988, p. 162). Theoretically informed comparison of Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, synthetically drawing on various strands of social movement theory, thus helps to explain both why these HROs emerged at all in Argentina and why they were relatively less effective than their counterparts in Chile in the early years after the coup.

Following the coup in March 1976, the Argentine military's chosen strategy in its "war against subversion" created a new category of social actor, as had occurred in Chile after 1973: relatives of the disappeared. This "ascribed identity" became the basis for the formation of three new HROs between 1976 and 1977, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, and the Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas. Accounts of the emergence of these organizations invariably emphasize the extraordinary extent and cruel nature of repression under the military junta. Attempting to avoid the international criticism that plagued Pinochet, the armed forces in Argentina opted for a policy of clandestine state terror combined with official denial. Brysk (1994, pp. 36–37) describes the characteristic technique of disappearance: "'Disappearance' involved kidnapping of unarmed citizens (usually in the middle of the night, from their family homes) by a gang of armed men, followed by forced removal of the victims to clandestine detention centers, extensive torture, and mistreatment, and (almost always) murder. . . . Although the kidnapers usually sought a specific person, other family members or visitors often "disappeared" in lieu of or in addition to the intended victim."⁵¹

This strategy effectively instilled a culture of fear in Argentine society with all its paralyzing effects (Corradi et al. 1992): the majority of the population did their best to live day to day by trying to ignore or deny what was going on around them. The Argentine armed forces were determined to exterminate "subversive cancers" from the body of the nation, and to do so, they targeted vast numbers of Argentine citizens. In the words of Brigadier General Ibérico Manuel Saint-Jean, former governor of Buenos Aires: "First, we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then their sympathizers; then the indifferent and, finally, the timid" (Comisión Argentina por los Derechos Humanos 1997,

⁵¹ Eduardo Duhalde (1983, p. 146) discusses an internal military document from 1978 that places the margin of error of the disappearance campaign at "no more than 25 percent" (approximately 2,500 people).

p. 13).⁵² The war against subversion in Argentina was not only a physical battle, it was also moral crusade. In response to a Mexican journalist seeking information on the fate of a woman confined to a wheelchair who had been detained, General Videla explained: "A terrorist is not only someone who kills with a gun or plants bombs, but anyone who encourages their use by others through ideas contrary to our Western, Christian civilization."⁵³ For this reason, the military government enacted sweeping censorship laws and even took the trouble to individually ban thousands of books, songs, and films, among them "*El Principito*" (The little prince), in its ninety-fifth edition in Argentina (Garcia 1995).

In these extremely repressive conditions, the founders of Madres de Plaza de Mayo met while searching for information about their disappeared children in government offices. Beginning in April 1977 a small group of these women decided to engage in symbolic protest against the regime by marching in the central public space of the nation, the Plaza de Mayo. Despite government attempts to crush the organization (nine of the original founders were "disappeared" after their meetings were infiltrated by an undercover military officer) and continuous persecution (members were frequently arrested following demonstrations), the Madres and Abuelas continued their weekly marches in the plaza, attracting international press coverage for their vigils. Under such an unfavorable political opportunity structure, why did these women risk their own security to protest the disappearance of their children and grandchildren?

Precisely because the decision by a small group of politically inexperienced women to stand up to the military junta seems so extraordinary and in many ways incomprehensible,⁵⁴ numerous authors have grappled with this question. Some accounts suggest that these women were able to confront the regime precisely because their claims—and the "identity" upon which they were based (motherhood)—were apolitical and were voiced in terms that challenged the regime's own discourse on "defense of the family." However, the disappearance of the founders seems to challenge the thesis that motherhood provided a protected space from which to launch symbolic protest. Other authors suggest that Las Madres protested the disappearance of their children because their sense of self, as

⁵² Quoted in Comisión Argentina por los Derechos Humanos (1977, p. 13; Rock 1985, p. 444, n. 33; Camps 1983, p. 63). David Rock reports that Saint-Jean subsequently denied making the remark, citing an interview with General Ramón Camps in which Camps states he does not believe that Saint-Jean made the comment (Camps 1983). To my knowledge, there is no public record of Saint-Jean himself denying the comment.

⁵³ *Clarín*, Dec. 18, 1977 (cited in Frontalini and Caiati 1984, p. 24).

⁵⁴ Because of the likely consequences and improbability of success of the Las Madres' actions, within Argentina they earned the reputation of "*Las Locas de la Plaza de Mayo*."

mothers, compelled them to do so (Navarro 1989, p. 256).⁵⁵ However, this explanation fails to account for the vast majority of mothers of the disappeared who did nothing to make the personal political. Most attempts to account for the actions of Las Madres do so through a NSM framework that emphasizes how “new” (previously nonpolitical),⁵⁶ “powerless” actors employ “untraditional” forms of symbolic protest and emphasize the expression of particular “identities” to make claims on society. More insightful analyses combine this approach with “an appreciation of the strategic uses of maternal legitimacy” (Brysk 1994, 187 n. 31). Additionally, the nature of repression (which “created” a new category of social actor) and the institutional context were conditioning factors (most of the women had sought help from the Church but had been turned away). In Argentina, Las Madres’ appeals to representatives of the state were directed to particular government offices, where relatives of the disappeared became aware of each other and came to recognize their shared plight and the futility of seeking help through traditional channels (Brysk 1994, p. 57). In contrast, in Chile, the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos y Desaparecidos (AFDD) was permitted to establish its office on Church property in the Vicaría.

Las Madres are often the focus of accounts of the Argentina human rights movement; this is likely because more than any other HRO to emerge in Latin America in this period, Las Madres captured the attention and support of the international community. Whatever limited political space they occupied was facilitated by international press coverage—skillfully manipulated by Las Madres leaders (MelliBovsky 1998). The image of defenseless mothers appealing to the military regime for information on the whereabouts of their children drew support from a number of international HROs and humanitarian foundations (Brysk 1994). “Framing processes” (Snow et al. 1986) were central in linking the plight of Las Madres to the international human rights issue network (Sikkink 1993). This allowed Las Madres to access international resources and support for their struggle without the benefit of the organizational networks of the Church. The publicity campaigns of Las Madres and their sponsors in a number of international forums contributed to growing international condemnation of the junta. And though their demands were ignored by

⁵⁵ In Navarro’s (1989) account, the identity of “motherhood” is the primary causal factor. This interpretation is supported by interviews with founders and members who explain their participation in such terms. However, a politicized sense of “motherhood” may be more a result of their participation in Las Madres than the original cause (see Calhoun 1991).

⁵⁶ For a critique of the claims of novelty made by many NSM theorists, see Calhoun (1993).

the junta, together with Las Abuelas,⁵⁷ these women gained increasing international publicity, influencing the process of delegitimation of the military regime, which climaxed with the Malvinas crisis in the early 1980s.

While linkages to the international human rights issue network enabled Las Madres and the broader human rights movement to survive the dictatorship and exercise limited influence in the process of transition to democracy, (Brysk 1994) their effectiveness (in terms of their own stated goals) under the military government was quite limited. In comparison with Chile, where the Church's position vis-à-vis the dictatorship and its extensive linkages to other domestic institutions and to political parties facilitated the formation of dense and extensive embedded networks of human rights activists working in a variety of spheres and levels of society, in Argentina, the HROs essentially stood alone during the worst years of repression (though collaboration among HROs facilitated limited contacts between some of the same sorts of actors who were important in the Chilean case.) In Argentina, groups of *afectados* who engaged in symbolic protest largely isolated themselves from the rest of Argentine society during the worst years of repression. In contrast, in Chile, under the auspices of the Church, religious leaders, lawyers, social workers, academics, and political party members engaged in arranging safe exile for refugees, in providing monetary, legal, and medical assistance to victims and their families, in creating soup kitchens and work programs, and in working to expand the network of NGOs, which eventually became a type of "surrogate" political opposition to the regime (Loveman 1994).⁵⁸ It becomes clear in comparative perspective that the vitality of the early HROs in Argentina was limited both by the severely repressive context and by the fact that they were not linked to previously existing social and political networks.

Conclusion

Theoretically informed comparison with Uruguay and Chile reveals Argentina to be an "intermediate case." In contrast to Uruguay, HROs

⁵⁷ Las Abuelas (grandmothers) made claims on behalf of children born to pregnant prisoners or to the disappeared. Children of the disappeared were rarely returned to their blood relatives. Instead, they were given or sold to military families or their friends.

⁵⁸ This is not meant to downplay the overall significance of the human rights movement in Argentina, both nationally and internationally: as was apparent in the transition process with its famous trials and convictions (and later pardons) of the commanding officers of the junta, the claims of Argentine HROs had a powerful impact on political culture (even if their attempts to influence policy largely failed; see Brysk 1994).

emerged in Argentina both prior to and during the height of repression. However, the Argentine organizations lacked the foundation of extensive social networks, connected to domestic and international institutional networks of the Catholic Church, which characterized Chilean HROs. HROs in Argentina were thus much more vulnerable and hence less effective in terms of their own goals than their counterparts in Chile. Personal networks linking non-Catholic and dissident Catholic religious leaders to each other and to their parishes, and the previously developed prosocial religious and moral commitments of these leaders, enabled the development of SERPAJ and MEDH in response to the repression prior to the coup (1974–76). Individual politicians, lawyers, professionals, and religious leaders created the APDH as a (noncommunist) alternative civil-libertarian HRO (Mignone 1991, pp. 99–106). These groups, as well as Las Madres and Las Abuelas, emerged despite (or because of) a severely unfavorable political opportunity structure by operating within “noninstitutional” spaces that were not *formally* restricted. However, these spaces offered little or no protection from state persecution, restricting the development and activities of HROs under the dictatorship. Comparison with the extensive programs under COPACHI and later the Vicaría in Chile suggests the crucial significance of such a protected space for the effectiveness and sustainability of contentious collective action in high-risk contexts. The absence of Church support also limited the possibilities for the HROs to develop networks linking activists from different sectors of society; this further restricted the effectiveness of these organizations in terms of their own goals. This was particularly evident for Las Madres and Las Abuelas. Despite international fame, the domestic influence of these groups during the mid- to late 1970s was limited by their relative isolation from other sectors of society.⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

By asking why and under what conditions individuals will risk their lives to confront state repression, I have identified an important area of research largely neglected in the existing social movement literature. Contrary to sociological and commonsense expectations, the cases examined

⁵⁹ The relative lack of domestic networks linking Argentine HROs to other social sectors, such as political parties, universities, and unions, may also partly account for their lesser influence during the transition to democracy, as compared to Chile. Comparative analysis of the role of HROs in the transitions in these countries, as well as their fate in newly democratic contexts, merits future research. For insights on Chile and Uruguay, see de Brito (1997); on Chile and Argentina, see Skaar (1994); on Chile in Comparative Perspective see Frühling and Orellana (1991).

here demonstrate that the onset of severe state repression, that increases dramatically both the potential risks and costs of collective action, may itself stimulate certain types of social movements. The generalized demobilization that is the expected outcome of dramatic increases in the scope and scale of state repression does not capture the entire picture; state repression may stimulate collective organization and opposition from certain sectors of society as a direct result of the severity and cruelty of its attempts to stifle it in others.

Comparative analysis suggests that participation in high-risk collective action depends largely on particular types of personal social network ties (McAdam 1986) and the particular way in which face-to-face networks are embedded within broader institutional networks (Morris 1984; della Porta 1988). Reliance on face-to-face networks permits a high degree of trust that helps to counteract the selective *disincentives* to participate posed by threats of state persecution. Dense interpersonal networks tend to insulate activists, which contributes to their intensified commitment and willingness to act despite risks of horrific repercussions. The particular way in which certain types of face-to-face networks are embedded within previously existing domestic and international networks largely determines the ability of activists to organize and sustain collective action in high-risk contexts. To explain the actions of the “early risers” in high-risk contexts, it is also important to consider how forms of repression collide with personal, moral, or political commitments developed prior to and in the process of participation (Calhoun 1991; Martín-Baró 1983). The diversity and density of networks within which the personal networks of early risers are embedded influences whether, or to what extent, the efforts of the first core group of actors will develop into sustained and effective collective resistance and opposition, creating openings for later waves of activists by reducing the costs or risks associated with joining. But ultimately the emergence and sustainability of social movement organizations is constrained by the political opportunity structure, particularly the levels and types of repression—that is, the ability of the government to effectively curtail and control access to material and symbolic resources and physical and sociopolitical space.

When early risers are able to create or expand openings, whether they will be filled by new actors depends in part on the ability to frame the struggle in terms that resonate in the wider society. Framing processes are also important for linking local struggles into broader “international issue networks” that may generate international publicity and funds (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Sikkink 1993). Additionally, both timing and participation are intimately linked to how the structure of nested social networks creates or impedes access to crucial resources including physical, sociopolitical, and symbolic ‘space,’ information, and

material assistance, particularly from transnational and international sources.

Comparative historical analysis employing a synthetic theoretical framework facilitates identification of those social processes that influence the emergence of collective action in high-risk contexts that are generalizable across cases with the consequent potential to *generate theory*. This approach illuminates how *particular configurations* of 'variables' affect outcomes. In an example from this article, comparison of Argentina and Chile informed by a synthetic theoretical approach suggested that the emergence and effectiveness of HROs was related not merely to the presence or absence of particular types of personal ties, *plus* the presence or absence of institutional networks, but rather to the particular way in which personal networks were *embedded within* broader, multilevel institutional networks. This approach redirects attention of the theorist to *relationships among* social processes operating at different levels, resulting in improved understanding of the linkages between the how and the why of social movements.

This approach thus offers the potential to bridge some of the gaps between resource mobilization and NSM theoretical schools, a need that has been increasingly recognized and articulated by leading theorists in the field (Klandermans and Tarrow 1988; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1995). It also facilitates borrowing from, and integrating, the contributions of earlier pluralist, rational choice, structuralist, marxist, and social-psychological social movement theorists. If construction of social theory and social scientific knowledge is to be a cumulative enterprise, the contributions from diverse theories and comparative historical research must be incorporated and assimilated rather than discarded or forgotten in a battle of competing paradigms. The explanations generated through this comparative historical analysis of the emergence of HROs in Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina thus serve as a modest example of the utility of synthetic theory building and comparative research rather than pseudoparadigmatic intellectual warfare.

TABLE A1
ESTIMATED EXTENT OF REPRESSION IN THREE SOUTHERN CONE COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	TIME PERIOD	PRISONERS						1976 POPULATION		
		DEATHS		Long-Term		Cumulative			EXILES	
		Total	Per 1,000 Population	Total	Per 1,000 Population	Total	Per 1,000 Population		Total	Per 1,000 Population
Argentina	1976-83	10,000	.40	7,000	.03	30,000	1.1	500,000	18.9	26,480,000
Chile	1973-77	4,000	.40	6,500	.60	60,000	5.8	40,000	3.9	10,372,000
Uruguay	1973-84	36	.01	4,000	1.40	60,000	21.0	500,000	175.0	2,847,000

SOURCE: Repression statistics are from King (1989); population statistics are from United Nations (1987).

NOTE: King's estimates are derived from a comparative analysis of a wide range of estimates from government sources, international and domestic human rights organization sources, and academic sources.

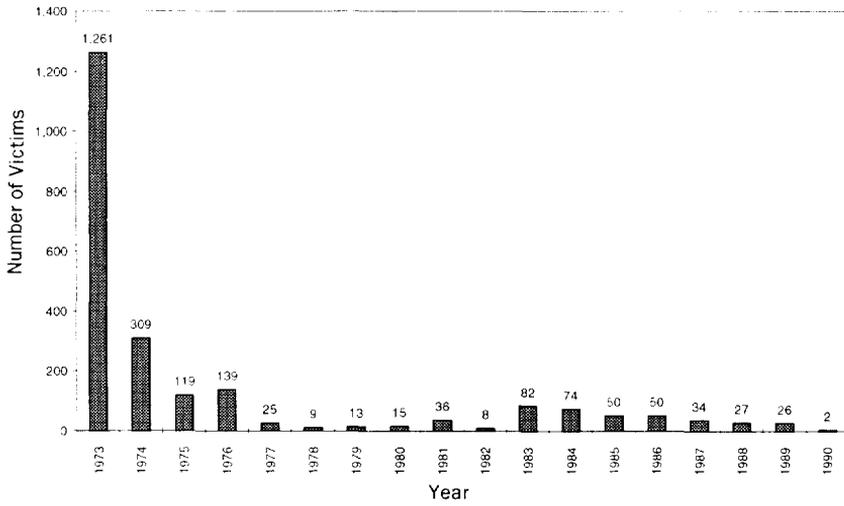


FIG. A1.—Victims of death and disappearance in Chile, 1973–90 (Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation 1993, p. 903).

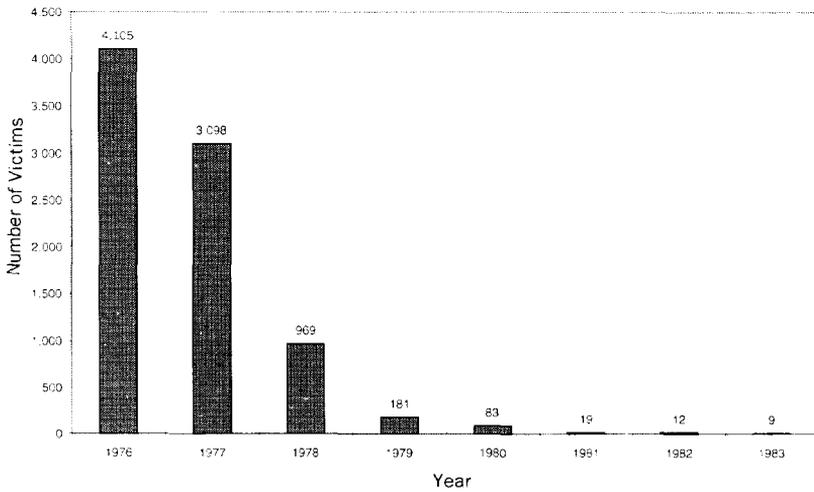


FIG. A2.—Victims of disappearance in Argentina, 1976–83 (Sikkink 1993, p. 427; Skaar 1994).

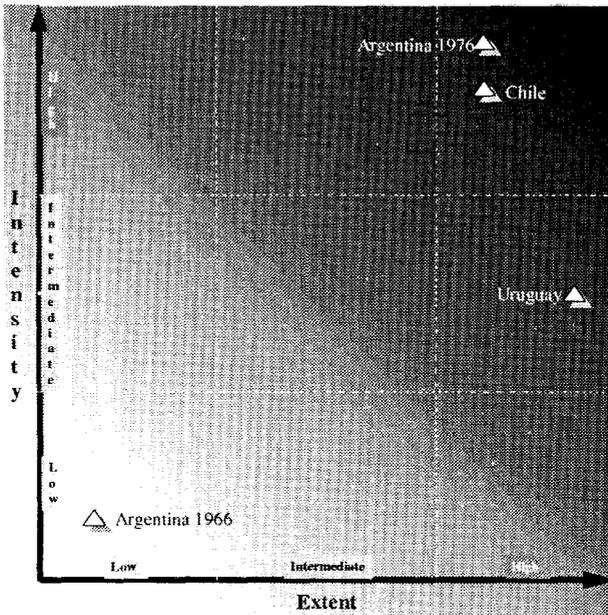


FIG. A.3.—Comparative intensity and extent of repression (from King 1989); “extent” refers to the gross number of individuals affected by repression; “intensity” refers to the manner in which they were affected. Extent is the cumulative total of deaths, number of long-term political prisoners, total number of political prisoners, and number of political exiles. Intensity is determined by the number of deaths and long-term imprisoned, with greater weight given to deaths. Torture is not systematically incorporated into King’s analysis (it is notoriously difficult to “measure”). However, he does mention that “qualitative aspects of the different cases are also evaluated in making the rankings.”

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