Political Parties and Legislators

A Latin American Perspective

Hélène Combes

In 1997 the coca-leaf growers movement, with Evo Morales at its head, became a political party: the Movement for Socialism – Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS-IPSP). This development was in keeping with the heritage of miners unions and the indigenous mobilizations of the 1990s in Bolivia. (Do Alto and Stefanoni, 2006)

While Brazil was still under dictatorship, trade unionists (particularly from the metallurgical sector), the urban movement in working-class neighborhoods, student activists, academics and so on came together to form the Workers’ Party (PT), the great promoter of participatory budgeting in the 1990s and the spearhead of the Latin American left and the World Social Forum. (Keck, 1992; Rocha, 2011)

In 1988, three years after the Mexico City earthquake, the Asamblea de Barrios housing rights association decided to symbolically field a candidate in the presidential elections. It chose “Superbarrio,” the movement’s champion and mascot (Cadena-Roa, 2002; Sánchez, 2004), a wrestler who defends those living in sub-standard housing and fights the IMF, the World Bank, government credit agencies, and so on. As the left slowly united behind Cuauthémoc Cárdenas, “Superbarrio” withdrew from the campaign and supported his candidacy. In 1989, “Superbarrio” and his activists participated in the foundation of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The leaders of the Asamblea de Barrios played a fundamental role there throughout the 1990s. (Combes, 2011)

“Though her eldest son will soon turn 20, Rosa is a still young woman. White, with a long chestnut braid and a lively sense of humor, Rosa could be any other Paraguayan peasant. But Rosa presented herself as a candidate in the

1 Translated from the French by Ethan Rundell. I would like to thank James Jasper and the anonymous reviewers of this article for their commentaries and suggestions for further reading.

2 In their typology of Latin American left-wing parties, Steven Levitsky and Kenneth Roberts classify the MAS as a “Movement Left” party (2011: 13).
elections... Rosa is a leader of the Land Rights Organization, the country's leading peasant movement, and a member of Frente Guazú, under whose banner she ran for office." (Macías, 2012: 82)

So many different scenarios: social movements and trade unions transforming themselves into parties, social movement activists and leaders creating parties or joining already existing ones. In the countries of Latin America, the cycles of mobilization against dictators and, later, for indigenous rights and against neoliberalism (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2011; Almeida, 2010) redrew the partisan political landscape. In European countries, many “new social movement” activists joined the ranks of left-wing parties over the course of the 1970s. Later, ecological movements transformed themselves into political parties. These phenomena can help us to see the emergence of new party machines as the outcome of a cycle of mobilization or the transformation of parties under the impact of the mass entry of activists formed in social movements. In other cases, multi-positioned activists remain in the minority and have little or no impact on a party’s internal operation.

Despite the extensive interaction between parties and social movements, few scholars have directly addressed the question of their relations and mutual entanglements (cf. Combes, 2011; Luck and Dechezelles, 2011; Goldstone, 2003; Van Cott, 2005). More often, research on particular actors mentions this interaction in passing (Gunter and Montero, 2002: 6). This absence of global analysis may be partly attributed to disciplinary compartmentalization (Sawicki and Siméant, 2010). While the party is a canonical object of political science, social movements were until the 1990s the almost exclusive preserve of sociology. These two actors were thus studied separately and gave rise to multiple approaches within each discipline. In his introduction to a book on the interaction between social movements, political parties, and states, Jack Goldstone (2003) thus did

3 See also the cases studied by Paul Almeida (2010) of movements in the cycle of mobilization against neoliberalism: Bolivia, Salvador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Ecuador. Almeida author speaks of “social movement partyism.”

4 The guerillas who transformed themselves into parties could also be mentioned in this connection. Yet I will leave this case aside as it seems to raise different empirical and theoretical issues. Similarly, I will not here address the role of social movements in defining public policy, a configuration in which parties play the de facto role of intermediary.

5 For a good overview of the relationship between parties and social movements, see Van Cott (2005), as well as Goldstone (2003) and McAdam and Tarrow (2010).

6 Evidence of this compartmentalization can be found in an overview of two journals of reference, both of which first appeared in the mid-1990s: Party Politics and Mobilization. Across
not hesitate to write that the former had been little studied even though political parties and social movements cannot be understood independently of their intimate relationship.

How have scholars described the interactions between these multiple actors? Too often in the literature on parties, the interaction between parties and other activist organizations is presented as a one-way relationship of dependence. For Angelo Panebianco (1988), in analyzing a political party one must take its interactions with the “organizations of its environment” into account as these constitute one of two explanatory variables of “the map of organizational power.” Panebianco identifies three types of interaction: (1) The party controls the organization; (2) The exchange is well-balanced: party and organization leaders alike profit, with each group needing resources from the other to maintain their respective organization; (3) The organization controls the party. The party needs the resources supplied by the organization in order to stay alive. Panebianco’s extremely schematic typology was developed to analyze the interactions between a single party and type of organization (trade unions in the case of the British Labour Party, for example) and does not take complex relations between multiple actors into account.

Katz and Mair’s (1994, 1995) classic work on the “cartel party” suggests that parties are disconnected from civil society, with the relationship between parties and SMOs presented as a thing of the past. For many authors, a party has been institutionalized when it is no longer open to “its environment.” Beginning in the 1960s, Huntington presented autonomy as a condition of an organization’s institutionalization: that is, the degree of differentiation from other social groupings and methods of behavior. Together with systematicity (the degree of interdependence among different sectors), autonomy is one of two criteria identified by Panebianco for defining political party institutionalization. Later definitions of political party institutionalization tend to be in line with this dual heritage and thus present autonomy as a central criterion of institutionalization. However, specialists of political parties consider institutionalization to be a positive development (with non-institutionalized parties seen as inchoate or at

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7 The other being the relationship between the various offices and bodies existing in the organization (Panebianco, 1988).

8 One of the few authors to hold that autonomy is not a necessary condition of institutionalization is Steven Levitsky, an expert on the Latin American Peronist Party. Levitsky (2003, pp.25-26) shows how an under-institutionalized party hierarchy and strong, yet informal, linkages to the “mass base” encourage a “combination of flexibility and endurance.”
risk). This particularly holds for countries, such as those of Latin America, undergoing a return to democratic rule: there is a “strong assumption in the democratization literature that party institutionalization is a vital ingredient of democratic consolidation” (Randall and Svåsand, 2002: 24). Indeed, the institutionalization of parties – and, as a consequence, party systems – is seen as an essential element in the consolidation or stability of democracies. In this context, continued ties with SMOs, taken to be a sign of instability, are more often condemned than studied.

In the literature on social movements, it is important to differentiate between schools. For “new social movements theory,” autonomy figures in the very definition of the social movement: autonomy, vis-à-vis the state but also vis-à-vis parties, is at the heart of the capacity to construct oneself as an actor. Much of the work on social movements in Latin America in the 1980s and 90s, when this theory was hegemonic, also conceived of these relations in terms of instrumentalization (Calderón, 1995: 27) and co-optation (Alvarez and Escobar, 1992; Alvarez, et al., 1998) and was characterized by a normative vision: simplifying things somewhat, parties were presented as the “bad guys,” agents of co-optation that encouraged the demobilization of social movements.

For the “political process model,” the relationship between parties and social movements is more or less directly factored into the framework of the structure of political opportunities (Tarrow, 1994). Kriesi et al. (1995) present the configuration of power in the political system as a decisive element in the development of social movements. Studying the democratizations of the Southern Cone, Patricia Hipsher (1998) holds that the relationship between parties and movements is one of two key factors that shape movements’ capacity to put their demands on the agenda.

Kitschelt addressed the emergence of new parties from the perspective of the structure of political opportunities (1989). Van Cott (2005), who has worked on the transformation of Indian movements into political parties in South America, also draws upon an opportunity structure approach, in a systematic comparative analysis of the conditions of possibility for the transformation of social movements into political parties. By studying six national configurations, characterized by different ethnic cleavages, she sought to determine the factors that explain the transformation of indigenous movements into political parties in several Latin American countries during the 1990s. Though Van Cott’s analysis concerns the specific case of ethnic movements, it offers more general perspectives for understanding

9 Herbert Kitschelt (1989) was one of the first to systematically study this question.
the emergence of parties from social movements. Yet, despite the wealth of her analysis, which can in many respects be extended to other national configurations, Van Cott hardly mentions factors internal to movements or the transmission of activist know-how. As many critics have pointed out (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999), studying the structure of opportunities does not suffice for understanding the emergence of a movement or political party.

Another way of understanding relations between parties and social movements is to attend to the very large body of work produced by the resource mobilization and political process school concerning social movement institutionalization.10 Doowon Suh defines this as “a process of social movements traversing the official terrain of formal politics and engaging with authoritative institutions such as the legislature, the judiciary, the state and political parties to enhance their collective ability to achieve the movement’s goals” (Suh, 2011: 442). For her, it is a matter of a “collective strategic choice of an SMO” (443). For authors who study a particular mobilization cycle or movement, social movement institutionalization can also allow a movement to achieve its chosen objectives in pursuit of social and political change (Meyer, 2007) despite the fact that its co-optation or preemption by political elites can bring the cycle to an end (Piven and Cloward, 1977; Tarrow, 1994).11 The authors cited nevertheless insist on the consequences in terms of demobilization, the deradicalization of demands, a loss of identity or solidarity for the movement, and so on.

To sum up, the manner in which the relationship between political parties and social movements is discussed (presented here in necessarily incomplete and schematic form) suffers from two drawbacks. The first concerns the normative reading of “autonomy.” For specialists of parties, the party/SMO relationship prevents institutionalization and, ultimately, democratic stability. For new social movements theory and, in a more qualified way, the resource mobilization and political process school, this relationship is linked to co-optation and demobilization: it endangers the movement itself since autonomy is part of the latter’s definition. In both cases, their condemnations prevent scholars from properly analyzing the phenomena at play. The movements’ players often individually or collectively interact with a variety of other players. These interactions mold some players. Indeed, players who belonged to different arenas and/or were opposed to one another can develop common interests and worldviews as

10 For a recent overview, see Suh (2011).
11 See the large body of feminist work on this aspect.
well as relations of trust and friendship. These sometimes lead individual players to join an organization in another arena.

The second drawback stems from the methods employed and the macro-sociological level of analysis. Mainstream scholarship on parties favors quantitative and comparative methods, with the object of investigation constructed in an a priori manner. For example, field work and ethnography are almost entirely absent from the articles published by the journal *Party Politics* since its creation in 1996. Moreover, relations between categories of actors are sometimes conceived without taking into account the multiplicity of interactions among players. The actors are not homogenous in geographic terms or in terms of their respective levels (local, regional, national).12

Research on institutionalization does not take sufficient account of the variety of arenas that are involved (e.g., issues of geography as well as the types of administration with which collaboration is established). Even if a party is in power at the local or national level, it is also important to understand the differences between the party as an organization and the administrative logics in interactions with social movements. But the main analytical problem with this approach is that it considers the movement as a collective and homogenous entity and institutionalization the result of a collective choice.

This is particularly true of the political process school. As Michel Offerlé has underscored, activist collectives are invested by actors capable of making very differentiated use of them. Such collectives are “the result of the multiple random improvisations by which political entrepreneurs finding themselves there for no doubt very diverse reasons produce themselves as politicians while simultaneously producing the groups they bring together” (Offerlé, 2010, 40). The relationship between party and SMO is not a fixed given but rather closely depends on practical and symbolic confrontations within various arenas and the multiple social and activist stances taken by its players. As a result, one must enlarge one’s field of vision and attend, not only to the “party tout court,” but also to the interactions that the party, SMOs, and their players maintain, forge, activate, or reactivate with social movements, social organizations, trade unions, NGOs, and so on. It is therefore essential to combine an analysis at the micro-sociological level (individual involvement, local situational interactions, etc.) with a macro-sociological analysis at the scale of activist networks – that is, of the players engaged in the protest arena.

12 Some authors are more attentive to the play between parties and social movements, matters of “alliance, cooperation, competition, open conflict” (Luck and Deschezelles, 2011: 13).
In order to do this, we must move beyond monographic works focused on a single party or movement. Instead, we must examine the flux of players at work in the protest arena over the medium and long-term and the dynamics of activist reconversions and multi-positioning. By multi-positioned players, I mean individuals who occupy leadership positions within one or more SMO organizations and simultaneously pursue a political career within a party. By activist reconversion, I am referring to the fact that former SMO leaders, at the moment of a party’s creation or over the course of its existence, abandon their activism in an SMO to devote themselves to engagement within the party. These two phenomena will be grouped together under the term multi-engagement. Such an approach implies varying the levels of observation by analyzing the individual activism of players (Auyero, 2003), “microscopically” observing (Auyero et al., 2008) actors in context (at party and SMO meetings, protests, etc.) and understanding the collective dynamics that thus emerge at the scale of the protest arena.

The Latin American continent and, in particular, Mexico will serve as my terrain of investigation. The argument I develop nevertheless appears to be applicable to other configurations, particularly those marked by processes of political change, as in Arab countries. The nature of relations between parties and movements is always complicated. I now turn to an example drawn from field work conducted in Mexico: an analysis of the multi-engagement of leaders of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), a left-wing party created in 1989 in the context of a “democratic transition.”

Episodes of Protest and the Construction of Networks of Multi-Positioned Players

On the basis of data collected by Joe Foweraker and Todd Landman for the period 1968-1990 (2000: 12) and consultation of activist sources from the 1990s, five phases may be identified: a long phase starting in the early 1970s and ending in 1978, during which the main actors were peasants; a second phase between 1979 and 1984 focused on economic questions, during which the main players were trade unions and independent coordinating committees; the 1985-1986 phase concerning the housing question; that of 1988 on electoral issues; and, finally, a last phase centered on the Zapatistas.
and the 1994 economic crisis. I have reconstructed the collective activist careers of the leaders of the PRD who held office during these phases in order to identify variations in themes and arena of engagement via statistical analysis and the reconstruction of individual career paths (Combes, 2011). In this part of the chapter, I will give attention to the effects of phases of mobilization on multi-engagement and thus on the players’ arenas of engagement. By way of several examples, I will sketch the trajectory of the leaders who entered the PRD following a period of SMO activism.

**Guerillas and the Urban Popular Movement**

Like nearly everywhere else in the world, 1968 was a watershed year for Mexico. As the country prepared to host the Olympic Games, the student protest movement seemed a threat to the ruling party. On 2 October 1968, the army killed more than 200 students at Mexico City’s Tlatelolco Square. Other student demonstrations were violently repressed in the early 1970s. In response to the fragmentation and atomization of the 1968 movement, guerilla groups flourished across the nation’s territory (Okión Solano and García Ugarte, 2006) in rural communities and the outlying neighborhoods of the country’s major cities (Eckstein, 1989; Haber, 2006; Tamayo, 1999; Bennett, 1998). More generally, activists who went into hiding worked with disadvantaged populations, offering literacy courses, free medical attention, assistance in land occupation, and help in formulating demands for basic services (water, electricity, sewer mains). These efforts helped establish a vast oppositional network. Gradually, guerilla operations gave way to efforts at aid and politicization. With the legalization of the left and the amnesty of the late 1970s, many groups chose to come out of hiding and sometimes joined the political game. These players thus switched arenas.

After the 1985 earthquake in Mexico, the process of “democratic transition” accelerated. Indeed, faced with the government’s inability to assume its responsibilities in an emergency situation, requests by victims for immediate aid rapidly transformed into a vast protest movement. Some players, many of whom were drawn from the guerilla movement, mobilized the SMO networks they had forged during their years underground, becoming the main actors of what is known as the Urban Popular Movement (MUP).

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14 In the first two chapters of my book, the effects of interactions with the various sectors of the state (various agencies and territorial levels) are procedurally analyzed for each of the period’s movements.
Thanks to them, this movement shifted from a focus on material demands to fighting the single-party state.

*Portrait 1*

As a student leader in the 1970s in northern Mexico, Marco Rascón\(^{15}\) became involved in the guerilla movement. He participated in multiple land occupations and was then imprisoned for having robbed a bank. After being freed, he left the north for Mexico City, where he contributed to the *Point Critique* review and began to work in the capital’s working-class neighborhoods. After the 1985 earthquake, he created the Asamblea de Barrios (Neighborhood Assemblies)\(^{16}\) with other members of the review. This became the foremost organization of the Urban Popular Movement (MUP). Its spokesman, Superbarrio (Super Neighborhood), a masked wrestler (Cadena-Roa, 2002) for whom Rascón served as the intellectual inspiration, was the defender of the poor and democracy. He marched at the head of the massive protests organized in support of disaster victims, led meetings of Asamblea de Barrios and “confronted” the leaders of the PRI and the state itself in parody wrestling matches. And of course he always got the best of them! He even stated that he would be a candidate in the 1988 presidential elections but ceded his place to Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Rascón actively participated in the candidate’s campaign. When the PRD was created, he was a member of the first national executive committee. While continuing to act as the leader of Asamblea de Barrios, he became president of Mexico City’s PRD in 1991. In 1994, he was elected as a federal deputy and continued to use the art of parody as a political weapon in Congress. In 1997, he was named advisor to Cárdenas. After losing a 1999 primary bid in Mexico City to become party leader, he withdrew from the party’s governing bodies.

**The 1986 Student Movement**

For the first time since the massacres of 1968, students took to the streets in 1986 to demonstrate against government measures seeking to establish fees and entrance exams at Mexico City’s National Autonomous University (UNAM), the breeding ground of politicians and elites since the 1910 Revolution. The University Students Council (CEU) was born. Broadly supported


\(^{16}\) In particular, with several members of a former guerilla group from the state of Guerrero (the ANCR).
within UNAM by middle- and working-class students alike, the CEU did its part to further undermine the legitimacy of the PRI. When Cárdenas announced his candidacy in the 1988 election, the most prominent CEU leaders threw their support behind him and brought an army of activists with them.

**Portrait 2**

Marti Batres’s engagement in the student movement coincided with his involvement in a MUP housing rights organization – the Popular Union of New Tenochtitlán (UPNT) – whose leader, René Berajano, was a trade unionist teacher. As the latter’s heir apparent, Batres quickly became one of this influential organization’s leading figures and created his own movement in the capital. Besides his activism in the domain of housing, he kept a foot in the student movement and became PRD president for Benito Juarez, Mexico City’s most “middle class” district. He was elected as a local deputy in the aftermath of Cárdenas’s victory in 1997. His “organization-movement” was the largest parliamentary group of the PRD, which itself held a large majority in the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District. Batres became its president at the age of 32. Elected as a federal deputy, he became head of the PRD’s parliamentary group three years later. In 2005, he was elected to the head of the PRD in Mexico City and, from 2006, was “secretary of social development,” one of the most important “ministries” of the Government of the Federal District (GDF). In 2012, he left the PRD with a number of the historical leaders who had come from the social movements and followed López Obrador in the creation of a “party-movement,” MORENA, which holds more oppositional positions than the PRD (Combes, 2012).

The tentative beginnings of the “democratic transition” in the late 1970s and the politicization of social struggles in the 1980s thus helped create favorable conditions for the partisan engagement of certain SMO players during the creation of the PRD, increasing the number of arenas in which they were active.

**Comings and Goings between Party and Movements**

As illustrated by the career of Gerardo Fernández Noroña, several movements that emerged after the creation of the PRD also gave rise to comings and goings between arenas.

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17 Interviews with the author in Mexico City, January 1999.
Portrait 3
Born in Mexico City in 1960, Gerardo Fernández Noroña defines himself as a “social and political leader driven by great passions and a controversial figure.” A graduate in political sociology from the Metropolitan Autonomous University, he worked for several years at the Mexican Social Security Institute (1985-1992). In 1988, he was “noticed” (in his words) by the Mexican Socialist Party for his work at the head of a neighborhood SMO. Though he did not belong to the party, he became its candidate in his district's legislative elections. Gerardo joined the PRD upon its creation a year later. He rapidly climbed the rungs of the party's regional leadership and, in 1992, became president of the PRD for the State of Mexico. In 1994, though only 34 years old, he launched a primary campaign for the Senate, winning the internal party elections, which were challenged and then nullified. Gerardo persisted and became persona non grata in the PRD. A professional politician since 1992, he found himself without resources: he separated from his companion, herself a member of the PRD. The latter kept their beautiful apartment and gave him a taxi, which, according to him, became his only resource. Indebted, he found himself caught, like many Mexicans, in the spiral of increasing interest rates. Gerardo then decided to create his own organization for debtors’ insurgency (Williams, 2001): the Citizen Assembly of Bank Debtors.

While the scale of his organization remained small, it quickly acquired some notoriety and benefited from large-scale media coverage thanks to the spectacular nature and varied repertory of the actions it carried out: activists intentionally throwing themselves under the wheels of the presidential car, festive happenings, theater plays based on the popular myths and rumors of the moment and so on. Gerardo Fernández Noroña adopted and transformed the heritage of the Urban Popular Movement (Haber, 2006). Starting in 1998, he also created a taxi union and, once again, organized a series of spectacular actions, including the total occupation of Mexico City’s central square by taxis. On the strength of his success in organizing protest action, Gerardo Fernández Noroña once again set off to conquer the PRD. Thanks to the legitimacy he had re-acquired through his protest activity, Gerardo regained his place in the PRD. For several years, he occupied various posts of responsibility in party bodies before once again resigning from the party in December 2007 to become more fully involved

18 Interviews with Gerardo Fernández Noroña, Mexico City, 1999 and 2000.
19 CV of Gerardo Fernández Noroña, archives of the PRD.
20 Personal archives of Gerardo Fernández Noroña.

This example of an individual career shows that, in addition to multi-positioning and the redeployment of social leaders within the party, players come and go between the PRD and SMOs. Yet, as we shall see later, these comings and goings are only viable to the degree that access to the party remains open. More generally, these trajectories also show that interactions between SMOs and parties depend on the conjunction of a multiplicity of factors: variables proper to the activist careers of actors (biographical considerations including private life, age or difficulties of the activist life, etc.) (Fillieule, 2001); global conjunctural variables, such as the emergence of a large-scale social movement or, as we have seen above, the reactions of particular state sectors at the local level as well as those of federal and national states; and, finally, considerations proper to particular domains (electoral, economic, social policies, etc.). The mobilization or reactivation of networks that we observe does not arise mechanically but depends on the convergence of these conjunctural factors. It is thus only by means of a precise analysis of the players’ goals that one may understand their involvement in one or more arenas.

The Networks of the “Partisan Milieu”

What’s more, the PRD leaders’ involvement in multiple arenas of protest allows us to understand the formation of a “partisan milieu”: that is, “the collection of consolidated relations between groups whose members’ principal aim is not necessarily to participate in the construction of a party, though they in fact contribute to it by their activity” (Sawicki, 1997: 24).

The shift from social movement engagement to partisan engagement clearly does not result from the simple co-optation of players but rather from the completion of an activist phase that is reflected in the demobilization of the movement’s members and, as a consequence, the “migration” of a generation of players toward a given arena or new structure (in this case, a party). Yet very often leaders or activists continue their campaigns, though less actively, in SMOs or at least maintain ties with these organizations. They are thus multi-engaged, as shown by the three portraits above of social movement leaders. In order to grasp this phenomenon, we must consider, not a given movement in isolation, but rather long-term episodes in order to understand the passage of entire generations of players from one arena to another. What remains to be understood is the manner in which
the presence of social movement players affects a party: How did players coming from SMOs shape the organizations they captured or constructed?

Table 2.1  The Non-Partisan Engagements of National, Regional, and Local Leaders of the PRD between 1968 and 1997

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Source: Database established on the basis of the CVs of primary candidates for parliamentary election (proportional) and a survey conducted at the April 2001 Congress of Zacatecas

Partisan Arenas Shaped by SMO Players

The Supervision of Activists

Depending on the circumstances, the activities promoted by SMOs take either an SMO or partisan form. While SMO activists do not directly participate in the activities of the party’s local committees, their meetings are largely devoted to the activities of the PRD. The conduct of meetings of the Asamblea de Barrios (Marco Rascón’s organization – Portrait 1) nicely

21 The analysis of activism has been carried out in terms of the five principal phases of mobilization identified for this period.
illustrates the imbrication of the life of the movement with partisan life, as indicated by the following ethnographic description:

It is 4 p.m. on a Saturday in January. Many activists are unable to enter the conference room of the Asamblea de Barrios of the Romero Rubio neighborhood: the room is full, with around 200 people in attendance. Several families have come but most there are women accompanied by their children. The women are between 25 and 50 years old and talk in small groups. Very quickly, my presence draws attention and an official asks me to join her at a table at the back of the room facing the activists. The meeting begins. I am asked to say a few words to explain my presence to the activists. Then the heads of a series of committees give updates regarding their activities. There are as many committees as there are problems in the neighborhood and these are discussed one after the next: childcare in vacation periods, free access to eyeglasses for old people, gender relation workshops and of course issues of security. Once the committees have finished their reports, the follow up on housing requests is addressed. Several leaders detail the progress of case files, the activists concerned, meetings with creditors. Then nearly 45 minutes are devoted to PRD news: there is an update on its positions concerning political reform and important elections in several states of the federation, relations with the PAN are mentioned as well as the legislative agenda. Several words are then said concerning the municipal council of Mexico City, which was won by the PRD a year and a half earlier: the speaker focuses his intervention on “the media's campaign of harassment” against the Government of the Federal District (GDF – municipal council of Mexico City), calls upon the activists of Asamblea de Barrios to not let themselves be fooled and asks them to explain the real situation to their neighbors. Several minutes follow on the internal life of the party: the internal elections that will soon take place and the possibilities of alliance for Asamblea de Barrios. Finally, the activists are encouraged to participate in activities – participation in a demonstration, the dispatch of supplies – intended to support the Zapatistas (January 1999).

In the course of their internal meetings, social organizations thus see to tasks that traditionally fall to lower-level party committees. The PRD apparatus can thus carry out its more routine activities with a reduced number of officials and call upon PRD activists within the NSO – kept abreast of the party’s agenda – when the need arises. As one leader remarked, “without strong participation in demonstrations [organized by the PRD] on the part of social organization activists, we would have been unable to maintain the
pace of mobilization.” As Russell Dalton and Martin Wattenberg (2002: 266) note, “the task of the party organization does not require that each member is heavily active and the activity of those who remain [active] has increased significantly. Political parties have clearly adapted to the greater volatility of their environment by enlarging their grassroots organizations, even if the foundations of their membership base have shrunk.” The SMOs of the PRD’s “partisan milieu” offer a flexible and “enlarged base.” This mode of operation allows rapid adjustment to changing circumstances. For example, social organizations with leaders such as Marco Rascón, Marti Batres, or Genaro Fernández Noroña can rapidly mobilize hundreds of activists for demonstrations.

SMOs thus play a fundamental role in supervising the PRD’s “base.” This phenomenon can be observed in many Latin American countries. In its first years of existence, for example, Bolivia’s MAS Party did not develop a party infrastructure and used associative and trade union premises for its activities (Do Alto and Stefanoni, 2006).

Party Operation

Does the activist origin of its members affect the internal organization of a political party? How does it influence party operation? As some authors have underscored, parties issued from social movements have often imported the latter’s organizational models. European green parties, for example, have insisted on the place accorded their movement’s heritage in internal party organization, with a strong emphasis on the forms of direct or “discursive” democracy present in the “new social movements” (Faucher, 1999: 215-242). Heavily influenced by the experience of these movements, they have also often developed a discourse concerning verticality, consensus, and the struggle against the leadership. And, as in the movements, the effort to put such principles into practice has obviously come up against many difficulties. Moreover, these parties place little emphasis on internal discipline – no doubt a reflection of the institution’s relatively weak control over activists – and institutional loyalty is weak within them. Repeated (and often widely reported) episodes of internal conflict are the result. Does this hold for Mexico’s PRD as well?

As was the case of European green parties, a discussion regarding democratic procedures took place within the PRD. In 1993, or four years after
the birth of the PRD, the party decided to adopt “open” internal elections to select candidates for elected office and party leaders at all levels (from municipal to national). All members of the PRD were allowed to participate in these elections, which took place, not in party premises, but rather in public spaces (squares, parks, on the street). While such an approach is today commonplace, this was not so in the 1990s (Pennings and Hazan, 2001). In 1996, this procedure was expanded to all Mexican citizens with voter identification, with participating voters automatically considered as affiliated with the PRD. In 1996, for example, 358,244 activists / voters participated in elections for the party’s national leadership. In 1999, that figure had risen to 650,000 and, in 2002, 900,000 turned out to vote. In the debates that accompanied the implementation of these elections, multi-positioned players such as Marco Rascón, Marti Batres, and Genaro Fernández Noroña seem to have played a decisive role in the choice of this mode of operation. This is shown by the archives of the party governing bodies (national council, national executive committee) and the texts of the congress that approved these reforms. My attention was focused on the then emerging party norm (and so as much on the debates, negotiations, adjustments between players as on the texts that were finally adopted). These players perceived internal elections as a way of maintaining the ties between the PRD and the SMOs of the party milieu. Indeed, the internal operation of the SMOs allowed them to mobilize resources that could be reinvested in the internal workings of the party. Most SMOs have ways to strongly inspire voting by their members. For example, SMOs that receive state credits for the construction of social housing (Haber, 2006) use a points system to establish an order of priority for access to these highly coveted resources, with points attributed on the basis of member participation in party events, such as protests, meetings, and some of the PRD’s internal elections, as I observed by following the SMO activities of Marco Rascón (Portrait 1) and Marti Batres (Portrait 2). I cannot here enter into the complex debate over clientelism, which I have addressed elsewhere (Combes and Bey, 2010). Very schematically, it can be said that I share Javier Auyero and Pablo Lapegna’s concern to avoid contrasting clientelism with collective action (Auyero et al., 2009), as is often the case in the literature. Going beyond Javier Auyero’s position (Auyero, 2000), which in particular analyzes clientelism in terms of symbolic domination, I subscribe to the position staked out by Julieta Quirós in her excellent book El porque de los que van (2011), which calls for “an anthropology of politics as it is experienced.”

This mode of selection favored multi-positioned players in the competition to become a candidate for elected office: faced with the leader of a housing
rights association such as Marti Batres (Portrait 2), who enjoys a strong foothold in his district and is capable of mobilizing association activists, even a nationally recognized intellectual who played a fundamental role in the debate over democratization has no chance of winning an internal election. In 1997, for example, 90 percent of the PRD’s local Mexico City deputies came from SMOs. The significant place occupied by Marti Batres’s SMO and its status as a powerful current in the party partly explains how the latter became president of Mexico City’s local legislature when only 32 years old. These players, however, do not have the same social and gender profiles as other PRD leaders: most have a working-class background (sons of workers or peasants) and have very often benefited from significant social promotion thanks to the expansion of university access in the 1960s and 70s. Women also generally became involved in activism by way of SMOs (particularly those associated with the urban movement), which explains the relatively important representation of women in the PRD compared to other parties.

Transferring Resources and Know-How

Internal struggles over party construction can sometimes advantage the resources and activist know-how specific to SMOs over more traditional party resources (legislative knowledge, negotiation experience, national and sometimes international standing in the fields of politics and the media, bureaucratic competence, and so on). The leaders’ origin in protest movements explains their recourse to a repertory originating in the social movement tradition. Paul Almeida presents this as one of the criteria of partyism: the use of social movement-type strategies (e.g., disruptive actions and street demonstrations) to mobilize party members and other groups to achieve social movement goals (2010, 174).

In the Mexican case, the SMOs’ presence in working-class neighborhoods, strong capacity for mobilizing activists and sympathizers, and experience organizing protests (demonstrations, various forms of resisting the “repression” of local authorities, etc.) all contribute to the influence they enjoy within parties in these struggles. In the hands of leaders who are less well-equipped in social and academic terms, however, these resources are the object of a permanent campaign of delegitimization, with political opponents accusing them of incompetence and, above all, clientelism. Many SMO leaders who enter the political arena experience this form

23 I devote a chapter of my work to the specific question of social capital by activist origin (Combes, 2011: ch. 5).
of delegitimization. As in the Mexican case, they generally come from a working-class background, unlike other politicians. As an example, one may here cite the leaders of Bolivia’s MAS Party. After becoming deputies, they were criticized as incompetent due to their low level of educational attainment and their failure to master the Spanish language. Yet despite this stigmatization, a new political generation issued from SMOs sometimes succeeds in asserting itself in the political arena.

Table 2.2 Arenas and the Resource Transfers of Multi-Positioned Players

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Type of Exchange</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From social movement to party</td>
<td>Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protest experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Territorial presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From party to movement</td>
<td>Advice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic remuneration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material resources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table summarizes the various exchanges that can take place between parties and social movements by way of multi-positioned leaders. These exchanges are generally local, one-off and strongly depend on the fluctuating ties between collective players and individuals and sometimes even interpersonal relations. These ties also show significant variation over time. For example, during periods of electoral victory, parties distribute jobs and resources (material, pamphlets, posters, etc.) sporadically or en masse to multi-positioned players. In periods of electoral retreat, the latter can once again become paid SMO employees. Every evolution of the context entails a repositioning of players within the various arena and sometimes renegotiation of the terms of the relationship.

Yet, it should be specified that, in order to understand the implantation of social movement leaders in the party, I have chosen to take an approach that differs from the social movement institutionalization one. In this sense, my analysis allows us to move beyond certain limits inherent to the analysis of social movement institutionalization by showing how activists, despite (or because of) the institutionalization of their movement, experience very diverse trajectories: some become involved in another movement; others

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24 See, for example, the case of the Freedom Summer (McAdam, 1988).
become party or administrative personnel; for yet others, a more or less extended period in formal politics is at some point followed by renewed involvement in protest. By shifting our focus from the movement to activists and by placing their activism in a long-term context – that of an entire career of activism rather than solely the period of participation in a single movement – the institutionalization of a mobilization no longer appears as the end of activism but instead as a transformation of involvement opening the way to a wide variety of individual trajectories.

By Way of Conclusion: Conceiving Multi-Engagement in Terms of Cycles

To emphasize interactions between SMOs and parties and insist on the importance of multi-positioned actors is to swim, in part, against the current. At a time when some authors see a disconnect between political parties and “civil society” (Katz and Mair, 1994; 1995), it is tempting to study parties independently of their social and activist environments. The issue at stake is thus to conceive of the party-movement relationship in its full continuum. This can be done by bringing the contributions of two particular approaches to bear on the question: what are known as the contentious politics approach and the societal approach to political parties. These are attentive to the social and activist characteristics of the players and their interactions on the ground.

We must also break with the approach that consists of focusing on organizations (whether social movement or party) in order to attend to the long-term trajectories of multi-positioned players. The value of doing so is only revealed once we have moved beyond monographic studies on a given movement or party taken in isolation and revealed the dynamics at work in the political and protest arenas and the complex multiplicity of exchanges that take place there according to the various episodes of protest and arenas (political, protest, local, national, etc.).

Multi-engagement develops through episodes of protest, interaction with certain state sectors and the political reconfiguration of relations between institutional spheres and protest spaces. In order to achieve a global understanding of these phenomena, we must not stop at some arbitrary moment or in the midst of a sequence of mobilization. Rather, we must focus on “long” periods corresponding, at the very least, to the duration of an activist career. Such an approach profits from being combined with an ethnographic analysis of engagement, that is, the observation of players
on the ground in order to understand how their games and experiences (Quiroz, 2011) vary according to the places in which they find themselves, their emotions, and the actors with whom they interact.

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