Crossing the great divide: the Gandhian repertoire’s transnational diffusion to the American civil rights movement

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Chapter one

EXPLAINING THE GANDHIAN REPERTOIRE'S
TRANSNATIONAL DIFFUSION

1. Toward a theoretical analysis of the African-American encounter with Gandhi

The setting is Montgomery, Alabama—the cradle of the Southern confederacy and one of the most segregated places in the United States. The date is Monday, January 30, 1956—nearly two months after Rosa Parks’s refusal to give up her bus seat to a white man sparked the Montgomery bus boycott and the American civil rights movement. Martin Luther King, Jr., the young Baptist preacher leading the boycott, is supervising the collection during that evening’s mass meeting at the First Baptist Church. Suddenly, around 9:30 p.m., his close friend and associate Ralph Abernathy turns to King and informs him that his house has been bombed. After telling those present to stay calm and adhere to the boycott’s philosophy of nonviolence, he quickly returns home to make sure his wife Coretta and daughter Yolanda are unharmed. The African-American crowd King encounters on the way is visibly angry and armed. He hears one African-American man telling a police officer: “I ain’t gonna move nowhere. That’s the trouble now; you white folks is always pushin’ us around. Now you got your .38 and I got mine; so let’s battle it out.” Upon arrival, King rushes into the house and is relieved to find his family uninjured. As the appointed spokesperson for the bus boycott, he is obviously aware that this incident may endanger the nonviolent nature of the campaign. He walks out to the porch and addresses the volatile crowd.

“Now let’s not become panicky,” he tells the audience, after declaring that his wife and child are all right. “If you have weapons, take them home; if you do not have them, please do not seek to get them. We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must meet violence with nonviolence.” He then adds: “Remember the words of Jesus: ‘He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword.’” Finally, he urges people to go home peacefully:
We must love our white brothers, no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. Jesus still cries out in words that echo across the centuries: 'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; pray for them that spitefully use you.' This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love. Remember, if I am stopped, this movement will not stop, because God is with the movement. Go home with this glowing faith and this radiant assurance (King 1958).

Clearly touched by King's speech, the crowd answers with "Amen," "God bless you," and "We are with you all the way, Reverend," just as they do every Sunday in church. Instead of responding to its anger with violence, the African-American population of Montgomery demonstrates an unprecedented capacity for combining active resistance with nonviolence.

What is the deeper significance and meaning of this episode? Historians have demonstrated that King's oration on the porch helped sustain the nonviolent character of the Montgomery bus boycott and, subsequently, the civil rights movement. They have also pointed out that after the January 30, 1956 incident, the American public fully recognized King as the Gandhian leader of the African-American freedom struggle. King, in the eyes of supporters and adversaries alike, brought the philosophy and method of Gandhi to the United States. In *Stride Toward Freedom*, the narrative he wrote several years after the event, King confirmed his public image as the prophet of Gandhian nonviolence:

As the days unfolded... the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi began to exert its influence. I had come to see early that the Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of nonviolence was one of the most potent weapons available to the Negro in his struggle for freedom... Nonviolent resistance had emerged as the technique of the movement, while love stood as the regulating ideal. In other words, Christ furnished the spirit and motivation, while Gandhi furnished the method (1958: 84-85).

King, in this book, acknowledges his personal debt to Gandhi and devotes an entire chapter to his intellectual "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence." In this chapter, he gives credit to African-American predecessors like Mordecai Johnson, Howard Thurman, and Benjamin Mays for passing along their knowledge of Gandhi's achievements and philosophy to him, but he does not analyze their historical ties to Gandhi in any depth (King 1958).

King's narrative leaves the impression that his own individual pilgrimage fully explains the Montgomery bus boycott's adoption of the Gandhian collective action repertoire. Apparently, King was the first African-American leader to create the synthesis between
Christianity and Gandhian nonviolence that made the Montgomery bus boycott, and the American civil rights movement it inspired, so successful.

Actually, though, American individuals and groups started paying serious attention to Gandhi and the Indian independence movement in the early 1920s, and Thurman and Mays began translating Gandhian discourse into Christian terms at the end of the 1930s, after their visits to India and interviews with Gandhi. In the same decade, moreover, Richard Gregg, a Euro-American pacifist who had lived in India and worked with Gandhi, wrote a book that used familiar academic language to promote the applicability of Gandhi's protest methods in the West (Gregg 1934). And just before the next decade, Krishnalal Shridharani, an Indian nationalist residing in New York, made an even stronger case:

My contact with the Western world has led me to think that, contrary to popular belief, Satyagraha [i.e. Gandhian nonviolence], once consciously and deliberately adopted, has more fertile fields in which to grow and flourish in the West than in the Orient.... Perhaps the best craftsmen in the art of violence may still be the most effective wielders of non-violent direct action (Shridharani 1939: xxxv-xvvi).

Directly inspired by Shridharani's War Without Violence, James Farmer and George Houser—the former an African-American, the latter a Euro-American peace activist—subsequently decided to adapt the Gandhian repertoire of collective action to their own local context. They found a Gandhian organization aimed at racial desegregation, and initiate small-scale nonviolent direct action campaigns during World War II. Although the adoption process briefly stalled at the start of the Cold War, many of those who had experimented with "satyagraha" in previous years contributed significantly to the reinvention and implementation of the Gandhian repertoire during the civil rights movement's heyday from 1955 until 1965. In short, King was certainly not the first—and arguably not even the most creative—actor involved in the Gandhian repertoire's transnational diffusion, which commenced long before the young leader of the Montgomery bus boycott became aware of satyagraha.

Most civil rights historians, however, fail to appreciate the full significance of nearly thirty-five years of interaction between Indian and American activists before the African-American community in Montgomery adopted Gandhian means of protest. They generally acknowledge King's personal debt to Gandhi, but treat the role of the Gandhian
repertoire in the civil rights movement as secondary and indirect: secondary because it did
not emerge until after the Montgomery bus boycott started and indirect because it
primarily served to confirm the relevance of existing African-American institutions—
especially black churches, but also black colleges and associations—and traditions. From
this perspective, King’s main purpose in using exotic Gandhian language was to
legitimate the civil rights movement in the eyes of federal government officials. Northern
intellectuals, and the American public at large (Broderick and Meier 1965; Lewis 1978;
Garrow 1986; Branch 1988; McAdam 1996b).

Sudarshan Kapur’s *Raising Up A Prophet: The African-American Encounter with
Gandhi* is one of the few books on the subject that employs a wider time frame and
geographical perspective. Unlike other historians, Kapur explicitly deals with the
underlying transnational connections between the Gandhian movement in India and the
African-American freedom struggle *before* the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-1956,
and *before* King’s rise to international fame. He not only provides a broad historical
context for King’s porch speech, but also demonstrates persuasively that King followed
numerous other civil rights activists in combining the doctrine of Christian love and
Gandhian nonviolence. Kapur’s book, moreover, shows that acknowledging the
significance of indigenous Christian traditions does not rule out the transnational impact
of Gandhian ideas and practices. The Gandhian repertoire’s diffusion from India to the
United States succeeded because African-American groups were able to adopt it without
sacrificing their own cultural heritage or collective identity (Kapur 1992).

Yet while Kapur convincingly demonstrates that transnational diffusion of
Gandhian nonviolence was a long-term process involving various individuals and groups,
he does not specify what exactly traveled from India to the United States. Most
importantly, he does not indicate whether it was a particular tactic or a comprehensive set
of protest methods that disseminated. I argue for the latter option and suggest that it was
the Gandhian repertoire as a whole that disseminated, not just one specific form of
Gandhian nonviolence. Like Charles Tilly, the author of the concept, I define a
contentious repertoire as a wide range of claim-making routines that protest groups learn,
share, and implement in their interactions with authorities and the public at large. These
established ways of engaging in collective action are not the result of abstract thinking or
teleological processes, but evolve in response to previous experiences, current conditions, and changing plans for the future (Tilly 1995b: 26-27). Unlike Tilly (idem: 34), however, I argue that the contentious repertoire prevailing during the twentieth century was not necessarily national in scope. At least one contentious repertoire eventually traveled across national borders.¹

Following Tilly’s example, social movement scholars like Elisabeth Clemens and Marc Steinberg have extended the term to include organizational styles and discursive language. While Tilly focuses primarily on action forms, Clemens (1996: 208-209; 1993) asserts that protest groups tap into specific “repertoires of organization,” which are based on their culture’s normative, practical, and institutional rules or prescriptions. Steinberg (1999: 751; 1995; 1998), on his part, uses the “repertoires of discourse” idea to illustrate that collective struggles also produce familiar means of dialogue among challenging groups, opponents, and the public. Based on prior experiences, challengers create discursive repertoires by deliberately appropriating certain elements of dominant discourse and inflecting them with subversive meanings (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Terdiman 1989). Steinberg’s repertoires, in other words, reflect the communicative actions a particular protest group has grown accustomed to (1998: 34). Whereas Tilly emphasizes the “strategic” imagination of protest groups, therefore, Clemens and Steinberg respectively highlight their “institutional” and “dialogic” imagination; the latter two scholars specify, but do not refute, Tilly’s more comprehensive interpretation.

Based on the work of Tilly, Clemens, and Steinberg, I suggest that the Gandhian repertoire was a comprehensive set of claim-making routines, incorporating a unique and adaptable range of action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language. It was not only flexible and multifaceted, but also mobile: after emerging in South Africa and maturing in India, it subsequently served as the fundamental guide of the civil rights movement in the United States. Furthermore, the whole (the Gandhian repertoire) was greater than the sum of its parts (the Gandhian routines): the parameters of the Gandhian repertoire not only limited the choices of activists, but also enabled the “artful” creation and application of new methods or routines (Jasper 1997: 64-67; Emirbayer and Mische

¹ Tilly’s most important work on contentious repertoires concerns their emergence and development in France and Great Britain (Tilly 1986, 1995a; see also. Tarrow 1996). In his opinion, moreover, the contentious repertoires that evolved during the nineteenth century still predominate today (Tilly 1986: 391).
1998, Dewey 1958). American receivers, consequently, could create new types of collective action performances that were appropriate for their own context and ignore unsuitable collective action performances from the Indian context without contradicting Gandhi’s basic ideas and principles. Thus the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the organization founded by Farmer and Houser, employed the Gandhian repertoire to invent the “sit-ins” during the early 1940s, while King did not need to engage in “fasts-unto-death” to legitimate his status as a Gandhian leader during the 1950s and 1960s.

Besides under-specifying what diffused from India to the United States, Kapur also does not provide a theoretical framework for explaining how the transnational diffusion process evolved and why it took thirty-five years before American civil rights activists fully implemented the Gandhian repertoire. Although Indians and Americans shared a history of British rule and English as a national language, vast political, economic, social, and cultural differences between the two countries made transnational communication problematic, to say the least. Yet since Gandhi’s popularity within and outside of India was at its height in the 1920s and 1930s, it is surprising that American receivers did not fully implement his repertoire until the late 1950s and early 1960s, long after his death.

This dissertation focuses on the three questions that Kapur leaves unanswered: 1) What was the diffusion item that traveled from the Indian independence movement to the American civil rights movement? 2) Given the vast (and enduring) differences between the transmitting and receiving environments, how exactly did the Gandhian repertoire’s transnational diffusion start and develop? 3) Since Gandhi’s protest style was most successful in the early 1930s, why didn’t American activists fully implement it before the Montgomery bus boycott? I certainly do not claim to be the first scholar who is interested in these questions. More than anyone else, anthropologist Richard Fox has

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2 Just as a jazz ensemble’s repertoire allows its members to learn and adopt certain new songs very quickly, and other new songs very slowly or not at all, so the Gandhian repertoire allowed activist groups in India and the United States to learn and adopt certain new performances, but not others (compare Filly 1980, 1995a, 1995b).

3 As I will illustrate in subsequent chapters, the sit-ins were significantly different from familiar American protest tactics like the labor movement’s sit-downs—despite the linguistic resemblance between these terms (Fine 1969; but see Carson 1981).

4 Note that while English was a national language in India, only about 1% of the Indian population actually spoke English at the time (Arnold 2001: 116).

5 In fact, Gandhi came in second—after Einstein—in the Man of the Twentieth Century poll taken by Time magazine at the end of the previous millennium.
paved the way toward a more sophisticated understanding of the Gandhian method and its transit across national borders. After carefully examining the development of “Gandhian Utopia” and its fate in earlier work, he recently introduced several important theoretical concepts for exploring how it disseminated to the United States (Fox 1989, 1997). First of all, Fox argues that most American responses to Gandhian nonviolence either exaggerated the differences between Indian and American culture (“hyper-difference”) or overstated the similarities between Gandhian and familiar Western forms of nonviolence (“over-likeness”). Both hyper-difference and over-likeness “made the passage of a truly Gandhian nonviolent resistance from India to the United States dubious and difficult, not certain and easy” (Fox 1997: 68). To overcome these interpretive obstacles in the mainstream public sphere, he contends, radical American activists and organizations had to “dislocate” the Gandhian repertoire from the Indian setting and “relocate” it in the American context (idem: 75-80; Habermas 1989; Calhoun 1992). These insights, however, have not had much influence on dominant sociological approaches to transnational diffusion and social movements. My aim, therefore, is to incorporate Fox’s concepts into a broader theoretical framework and trace the Gandhian repertoire’s passage from start to finish, that is, from the early 1920s until 1965.5

The above questions are not only important for explaining the single case I am interested in, but also for exploring the transnational dimension of social theory in general and contentious politics in particular. Thus, before employing Fox’s concepts to construct my own theoretical framework, I now turn to two existing perspectives on the dissemination of ideas and practices: classical diffusion theory and contentious politics research. Although both approaches, in their own way, help conceptualize transnational diffusion between similar social movements, I contend that neither allows for a convincing analysis of transnational diffusion between two social movements as different as the Indian independence movement and the American civil rights movement.

5 In his chapter, Fox (1997) only refers to concrete historical examples and actors to illustrate his main concepts: hyper-difference, over-likeness, dislocation, and relocation. Applying these concepts, my dissertation seeks to provide a more systematic and comprehensive overview of the Gandhian repertoire’s transnational diffusion from the Indian independence movement to the American civil rights movement—both theoretically and empirically.
II. Contemporary theories on diffusion and transnational contention

In the 1950s and 1960s, prominent social theorists like Elihu Katz, Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, James Coleman, and Torsten Hagerström laid the foundation for a scientific model explaining how and why ideas, things, and practices diffuse. In 1962, Everett Rogers synthesized the findings of these illustrious scholars and established what I will call classical diffusion theory. As a recent volume of *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science* indicates, Rogers’s magnum opus (now in its fourth edition) continues to influence the majority of authors in the field, including those focusing on transnational contention (Lopes and Durfee 1999). This section starts with an outline of the classical diffusion model’s key elements and points to some of their implications. Then, it introduces the work of James Blaut and considers his critique of classical diffusion theory. Finally, it reviews important studies on transnational diffusion within the field of contentious politics, and identifies some of their strengths and weaknesses.

*Everett Rogers and classical diffusion theory*

In the first chapter of his famous book, Rogers (1995:5) defines diffusion as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system.” After reviewing the history and criticisms of diffusion research, he introduces and discusses each of diffusion’s four fundamental elements: innovation, channels, time, and social system. Together, these elements form the parsimonious and comprehensive model that continues to guide mainstream scholarship on the subject.

*Innovation.* In the first place, classical diffusion theorists assume that the diffusion item is an idea, practice, or object considered novel by receiving individuals or groups. The relevant internal characteristics of an innovation are those perceived as essential by receivers, not necessarily those intended by transmitters (Rogers 1995:111). Given this emphasis, classical diffusion theory identifies five internal attributes influencing an innovation.

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Since it remains the most extensive and influential book in the field, my discussion of classical diffusion theory will primarily focus on the latest edition of *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers 1995). For recent overviews of diffusion theory, see especially Strang and Soule (1998) and Wejnert (2002).
innovation’s rate of adoption: relative advantage, compatibility, triability, observability, and complexity. Relative advantage reflects the innovation’s perceived superiority compared to existing ideas or practices; compatibility refers to the innovation’s degree of consistency with receivers’ past experiences, present values, and future needs; triability indicates whether an innovation is conducive to experimentation before adoption; observability denotes the level of visibility of an innovation’s results; and complexity signifies how difficult it is for receivers to understand and use an innovation (idem: 15-16). Studies show that low levels of complexity and high levels of relative advantage, compatibility, triability, and observability increase the diffusion rate and diffusion speed of items as diverse as agricultural ideas, information on automobile safety, Post-it pads, Rogaine, the tomato-harvesting machine, the refrigerator, teaching methods, medical techniques, news events, and drug programs (idem: 42-43, table 2-1). Although classical diffusion studies recognize that some innovations allow for experimentation and reinvention by potential adopters, they generally emphasize that dissemination occurs after the innovation-development process has ended. They assume that in most cases diffusion only starts or proceeds when the innovation’s internal content is transparent, complete, and fully formed (idem: figure 4-1, 133, 159-160).

Communication channels. Secondly, classical diffusion scholars argue that communication is most likely and meaningful between transmitters and receivers with similar socioeconomic status, education, language, beliefs, behavior, living environments, and cultural background. Rogers (1995: 19) writes: “When they share common meanings, a mutual subcultural language, and are alike in personal and social characteristics, the communication of new ideas is likely to have greater effects in terms of knowledge gain, attitude formation and change, and overt behavior.” Diffusion between two parties that do not share these characteristics occurs only rarely, because social differences lead to misunderstandings, distortions, and ineffective communication (idem: 287). In other words, homophily—the term Rogers uses to describe the degree of similarity between transmitters and receivers—is a prerequisite for transnational diffusion.

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1 Thus, Rogers treats triability as a variable characterizing certain innovations prior to adoption by receivers, not as a fundamental aspect of the diffusion process itself.
Two channels of communication play a crucial role in mediating an innovation's spread from transmitters to recipients. First of all, *mass media* channels like radio, television, and newspapers (and, more recently, the internet) are the quickest and most efficient ways to create awareness and spread factual information about an innovation. Classical theorists emphasize, however, that *interpersonal* communication channels such as speeches, correspondence, word-of-mouth, and face-to-face talking are most effective for persuading potential adopters to embrace a new idea, practice, or product. Once a foreign innovation has been introduced into the receiving population, dissemination proceeds from people at the top of the social hierarchy to people at the bottom, producing a simple and unidirectional picture of the communication process (Ryan and Gross 1943; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld and Menzel 1963; Valente 1995).

Based on this general view of communication, then, classical diffusion theory divides the receiving population into five ideal-typical categories: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. It hypothesizes that innovators are venturesome and cosmopolite, early adopters are respected opinion leaders within the local community, the early majority consists of deliberate and highly connected decision-makers, the late majority represents skeptical community members motivated by peer pressure, and laggards are traditional and suspicious of innovations (Rogers 1995: 263-270; Merton 1968). These categories' degree of innovativeness yields a graph that is normally distributed (Rogers 1995: 262, figure 7-2; Ryan and Gross 1943).

For conventional diffusion scholars, however, the most important distinction is between *opinion leaders* and *followers*, not between innovators and conformists (Rogers 1995: chapter 8). They claim that the innovator is less essential for diffusion than the early adopter or opinion leader, because the latter functions as a personal role model for her peers while the former does not. Whereas opinion leaders embody the successful and trustworthy application of new ideas and products, innovators are often seen as reckless and dangerous in their behavior (idem: 295). Compared to their followers, opinion leaders tend to enjoy more links to the outside world (via mass media channels, cosmopolitanism, and contacts with innovators), be more involved in formal organizations
and informal discussions, be of higher socioeconomic status, and be more innovative (idem: 293-294). Their degree of innovativeness, though, depends on the social system’s norms. When these norms favor change, opinion leaders are relatively innovative; when these norms oppose change, opinion leaders are relatively conformist (idem: 295; Valente 1995). In sum, proponents of this paradigm present an orderly and hierarchical panorama of communication channels: homophily enables transnational diffusion, interpersonal influence channels the innovation’s flow from top to bottom, the receiving population consists of six definite categories, and these categories, in turn, highlight the distinction between opinion leaders and followers.

Time. The third fundamental element of classical diffusion theory, time, determines how the diffusion process evolves: it affects the sequence of diffusion stages, the rate of adoption, and the general causes at work. Researchers in the field have developed a straightforward model for analyzing the typical path of diffusion. During the initial knowledge stage, the potential adopter becomes aware of an innovation for the first time, often through exposure to the mass media, and seeks additional information. Based on contacts with trusted opinion leaders, the potential adopter forms either a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the innovation at the persuasion stage, especially about its relative advantage, compatibility, triability, observability, complexity, and flexibility. Assuming the attitude is favorable, the receiving party will then proceed to the decision stage, during which it either adopts or rejects the innovation. Classical diffusion theory explicitly assumes “a linear sequence of the first three stages in the innovation-decision process: knowledge-persuasion-decision” (Rogers 1995: 171-172). After making the mental decision to adopt, the receiving party actually applies the innovation during the implementation stage. Even then, however, the decision-making process is not finished: it may opt to either discontinue or reinforce implementation during the confirmation stage (idem: 20-21; Ryan and Gross 1943).

Time also channels the receiving population’s rate of adoption. Nearly all innovations, according to classical diffusion theorists, follow an S-shaped rate of distribution:

When the number of individuals adopting a new idea is plotted on a cumulative frequency basis over time, the resulting distribution is an S-shaped curve. At first, only a few individuals adopt the
innovation in each time period...these are the innovators. But soon the diffusion curve begins to climb, as more and more individuals adopt in each succeeding time period. Eventually, the trajectory of adoption begins to level off, as fewer and fewer individuals remain who have not yet adopted the innovation. Finally, the S-shaped curve reaches its asymptote, and the diffusion process is finished" (Rogers 1995: 23; Tardé 1903: 127).

Innovations only vary in the slope of their S-curve: those that diffuse rapidly have a relatively steep S-curve, while those with slower rates of diffusion have a more gradual slope. The innovation’s attributes and the degree of similarity between transmitters and receivers determine the speed of adoption and, therefore, the degree of slope (Rogers 1995: 11; Ryan and Gross 1943).

And finally, most researchers in this tradition agree that two kinds of social causes precipitate, propel, and sustain the diffusion process. In the early stages and during the take-off part of the S-curve the mass media is the prime mover; in the latter stages and the upper section of the S-curve interpersonal influence becomes the central driving force. Reception of an innovation proceeds in two steps:

The first step, from media sources to opinion leaders, is mainly a transfer of information, whereas the second step, from opinion leaders to their followers, also involves the spread of interpersonal influence. This two-step flow hypothesis suggested that communication messages flow from a source, via mass media channels, to opinion leaders, who in turn pass them on to followers (Rogers 1995: 285; Katz 1957).

The spread of an innovation throughout the receiving population flows downward, from one coherent entity to another, whereas each entity—the mass media, the opinion leaders, and the followers—plays a very specific role in the diffusion process (see also, Valente 1995; Burt 1999). Classical diffusion theory thus paints a clear and orderly picture of the adoption process. The adoption stages follow a regular and predictable pattern: the shape of the curve illustrating the adoption rate is universal (only the slope varies across time and space); and the core causes are clearly visible, closely interrelated, and sequential.

Social system. The fourth essential aspect of classical diffusion theory, the social system, represents the structural parameters and hierarchical relationships that stabilize and regulate the behavior of a society’s individual members. It contains a set of separate entities (individuals, formal organizations, informal networks, and subsystems) that coalesce to form the boundaries within which an innovation disseminates. By decreasing uncertainty, this structure determines “who interacts with whom and under what
circumstances" and allows the observer to predict when certain categories of individuals will adopt an innovation (Rogers 1995: 24-25). Diffusion, then, only takes place within a social system that facilitates the adoption of the innovation in question. Even if other variables—like individuals’ characteristics or the innovation’s attributes—are favorable, adoption will not occur unless the structural environment of the receiving population provides sufficient opportunities for diffusion (idem: 23-24, 37; Valente 1995). Guided by this structuralist assumption, researchers have traditionally taken homogenous communities or countries as their units of inquiry. Even those interested in diffusion across national borders presuppose that isolated entities come first, and relations among them afterwards. Such a view leads them to categorize each unit’s cultural norms, which Rogers (idem: 26) defines as “the established behavior patterns for the members of a social system,” as either enabling or obstructing the adoption of particular innovations.

Empirically, the achievements of classical diffusion theory have been impressive. The number of academic publications on this subject has now surpassed 4,000, while the people responsible for such work belong to a wide variety of academic disciplines and reside in countries throughout the world (Rogers 1995: xv). Conceptually, moreover, Rogers and likeminded researchers have established that some diffusion items spread more readily than others; that diffusion is not a mysterious or unguided phenomenon, but involves deliberate actors, identifiable communication channels, and concrete social contexts; and that diffusion does not occur instantaneously, but evolves over time (Strang and Soule 1998; Wejnert 2002). As geographer Jim Blaut and critical social theorists like Edward Said, Janet Abu-Lughod, Jack Goldstone, Kenneth Pomeranz, Samir Amin, and Andre Gunder Frank demonstrate, though, classical diffusion theory’s ideological perspective and theoretical assumptions are deeply problematic (Blaut 1977, 1987, 1993; Said 1979, 1993; Janet Abu-Lughod 1989; Goldstone 2000; Pomeranz 2000; Samir Amin 1988; Frank 1998).

For more on the linkage between space and diffusion, see especially, Hägerstrand (1967), Hugill and Dickson (1988), and Hedström (1994).
James Blaut's critique of classical diffusion theory

In his work, Blaut (1987: 30-31; 1993: 53) argues that the key concepts and arguments in classical diffusion theory derive from modernization theory (Rostow 1960; Lerner 1968; Inkeles and Smith 1974; Chirot 1977), the theory that underdeveloped "non-Western" countries have to adopt Western capitalist goods and technologies—as well as the attitudes, ideas, and behaviors associated with them—to achieve higher "stages of development." He points out that this theory (either explicitly or implicitly) accepts the following propositions about transnational diffusion: 1) innovation and progress stem from Western democracies in the core of the world system; 2) non-Western countries in the world system's periphery are usually stagnant and backward; 3) Western progress derives from superior rationality, spirit, and values; 4) the cultural reason for non-Western backwardness is inferiority in above areas; 5) non-Western countries can only advance through rapid diffusion of progressive ideas, goods, and practices from the West; 6) in exchange, Western democracies receive material wealth and manpower from non-Western areas; and 7) ideas, goods, and practices that diffuse from the "non-West" to the West are ancient, savage, unoriginal, and destructive (Blaut 1993: 14-17; 1987: 32). In short, both modernization and classical diffusion theory assume that the transnational diffusion of beneficial innovations is basically centrifugal: diffusion items either flow from core countries to other core countries, or in rare cases from the world system's core (the West) to its periphery (the non-West) (see also, van der Veer 2001: 3; Said 1993). They also assume that, although diffusion does not occur instantaneously, it either proceeds quickly and smoothly or not at all.

While Blaut's arguments focus on uncovering the Western and modernist biases at the classical model's foundation, they also hint at the preconceptions in each of its elements (Blaut 1977, 1987). By assuming that the diffusion item is fully formed before
dissemination, the classical model ignores that many innovations—including the Gandhian repertoire—are dynamic works-in-progress rather than well-defined, finished products. By drawing sharp boundaries between communication channels and adopter categories, it denies that all individuals and communities have equal potential for invention: claiming that diffusion necessarily flows from opinion leaders at the top of the social hierarchy to followers at the bottom is elitist and precludes the possibility of innovative contributions from the bottom up. By presuming that diffusion involves a linear sequence of stages, a predictable rate of adoption, and recurrent causal steps, it underestimates the importance of non-linear developments, unexpected ups and downs, and surprising contingencies in the transnational diffusion process. And finally, by taking for granted that diffusion only occurs within conducive social systems, the classical model excludes the possibility for transnational diffusion between groups and social systems that remain very different. Thus Blaut (1993) convincingly demonstrates that both the general hypotheses and the specific features of classical diffusion theory suffer from misguided preconceptions (or what he calls “geographical diffusionism”). These biases, in turn, impede an historical analysis of diffusion from the world system’s periphery to its core, and from the receiving population’s “followers” to its “opinion leaders.” But whereas Blaut’s critical analysis helps to deconstruct classical diffusion theory, it does not provide a clear and balanced map for studying transnational diffusion between activists and between social movements.

Transnational diffusion and contentious politics
Fortunately, after initially concentrating primarily on national processes and contexts, leading contentious politics scholars now recognize the importance of transnational flows and interactions (Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1989; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni 1995). In 1993, Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht wrote a groundbreaking article that laid the foundation for numerous recent studies on cross-border relations among activists and social movements. Building on the work of Everett Rogers and classical theorists, they argue that diffusion consists of the following fundamental elements:
Based on this definition, McAdam and Rucht subsequently analyze how the German New Left in the late 1960s adopted ideas and practices invented by the American New Left in the early 1960s. Fellow contentious politics scholars have followed their lead, applying a similar approach to other cases of transnational diffusion between social movements.12

Current scholarship on the transnational dimension of contentious politics offers many useful tools for studying the Gandhian repertoire’s difficult passage from India to the United States. Like myself, researchers in this field seek to identify what disseminates between social movements, and to explain how and why the transnational diffusion process evolves. As McAdam and Rucht (1993: 58) put it, “the real challenge is not so much in demonstrating the mere fact of diffusion...but to investigate systematically the conditions under which diffusion is likely to occur and the means by which it does.” In the first place, based on work by Charles Tilly, Marc Steinberg, and Elisabeth Clemens, among others, social movement scholars make the important distinction between comprehensive repertoires of contention and specific forms of collective action (Tilly 1986, 1995a, 1995b; Steinberg 1995, 1999; Clemens 1993, 1996). So far, however, they have primarily focused on easily observable and singular tactics, performances, or routines, leaving open the question whether entire repertoires may diffuse as well (McAdam and Rucht 1993; McAdam 1995; Giugni 1995, 2002; Tarrow 1998; Ayres 1999).13

Most contentious politics studies qualify classical diffusion theory by stressing that both direct interpersonal and indirect media channels may promote the dissemination process. McAdam and Rucht (1993: 63-64), for example, emphasize that a combination of face-to-face relational ties between opinion leaders and institutional “nonrelational”

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12 Here I concentrate on transnational diffusion between social movements, not on the often more sophisticated studies concerning domestic diffusion within or between social movements. For more on domestic diffusion and protest, see e.g., Oberschall 1993; Kim, unpublished manuscript; Oliver and Myers 2002; Myers and Oliver 2000; Myers 2000; Soule 1997, 1999; Hedström, Sandell, and Stern 2000; Hedström 1994.

13 The distinction between repertoires and tactics implies that: (1) receivers may adopt a tactic invented by transmitters without adopting the transmitters’ repertoire and (2) receivers may adopt a repertoire invented by transmitters and use it to develop their own new tactics.
ties increases the likelihood of transnational diffusion between social movements (Strang and Meyer 1993; see also, Giugni 2002: 23). These studies also generally highlight that organizational, cultural, and political conditions mediate the flow of ideas and practices across borders. Based on the work of Strang and Meyer (1993), for instance, McAdam and Rucht (1993: 63) emphasize that institutional equivalence and “attribution of similarity”—that is, cultural affinity and structural homophily—facilitate the construction of linkages among transmitters and receivers (see esp., Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Furthermore, Giugni (2002: 15) claims that political opportunities not only explain differences in the goals, institutions, strategies, and ideologies of social movements, but also help account for similarities. Like many others, he argues that “[e]ven though potential adopters have established strong feelings of identity with transmitters...protest or protest elements may not spread to another country because of [a] lack of political opportunities” (idem: 23; see also, Tarrow 1998: 186; Giugni 1995). Movement diffusion scholars usually add that successful application of a protest method in one environment—successful in terms of objective results as well as subjective evaluations—allows purposive and strategic “movement entrepreneurs” to export it to activists in another environment (Tarrow 1998: 187; Giugni 2002: 23; Snow and Benford 1999).

Recently, leading theorists have also started focusing on diffusion as a separate social mechanism, distinguishing it from other social mechanisms such as brokerage and appropriation.14 In their latest work, for example, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly (2001: 333; emphasis added) assert that diffusion is quite common and “involves the transfer of information along established lines of interaction,” while brokerage is relatively rare and consists of “the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites.” They then argue that “[c]ontention that spreads primarily through diffusion will not...transcend the typically segmented lines of interaction which characterize social life” (idem: 333-334). Consequently, “diffusion requires a much lower investment in time, entrepreneurship and frame transformation than brokerage. It follows that brokerage...is likely to be far more consequential in its impact on episodes

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14 Following McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 24), I define mechanisms as “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.” For more on the mechanism concept, see especially Hedström and Swedberg (1998).
of contention" (idem: 334-335; see also, McAdam 2002). Thus, brokerage enables the construction of resilient cross-border networks between different transmitters and receivers, whereas diffusion merely consists of rapid and transitory information flows between similar transmitters and receivers (Tarrow 1998: 186).

Since they regard diffusion as a temporary and superficial mechanism, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 47) also carefully distinguish it from the appropriation mechanism, which they define as the capacity to "create an organizational vehicle or utilize an existing one...to mobilize the required resources for sustained and collective contention." In their opinion, dissemination involves neither the construction of linkages between previously unconnected transmitters and receivers, nor the formation of activist networks that are prepared to fully implement the diffusion item to enable and or sustain a social movement. They insist that when the means are available and the external conditions are favorable, receivers adopt transmitters' successful methods quickly and without much "labor." Basically, therefore, McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, and likeminded scholars regard transnational diffusion between social movements as a process primarily driven by adaptive emulation (Tarrow 1998: 187; Strang and Macy 2001), not by creative learning or "artful" experimentation (Jasper 1997: 64-67; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Dewey 1958). For them, mechanisms such as brokerage or appropriation have a more significant and transformative impact on contentious politics than diffusion.

Without denying its empirical and theoretical achievements, I suggest that the current approach to transnational diffusion between social movements remains limited. Contemporary contentious politics scholars still tend to assume that the diffusion item is static and well-defined; that opinion leaders and the mass media are the main receiving channels; that once these channels exist, diffusion proceeds rapidly, linearly, and according to predictable mechanisms; and that successful transnational diffusion requires transmitters, receivers, institutions, and social systems with similar social, cultural, economic, and political characteristics (the homophily principle) (Hedström, Sandell, and Stern 2000: 150-152; Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; Strang and Meyer 1993; Strang and Soule 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Nearly all of their case studies, moreover, deal with transnational diffusion among Western social movements or from

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1 For more on the "labor" involved in transnational diffusion, see especially Scalmer (2000, 2002).
Western toward non-Western social movements, leaving the impression that the “natural” direction of flow is centrifugal, from the world system’s core toward its periphery (Tarrow 1989, 1994; Tarrow and Soule 1991; McAdam and Rucht 1993; McAdam 1995; Koopmans 1995; Oberschall 1996; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Giugni 1995, 2002).

The most important exception is the chapter by David Snow and Robert Benford (1999), which explicitly criticizes contentious politics scholars for adopting classical diffusion theory’s principle of homophily without considering its problematic aspects (see also, Erickson Nepstad 2002). They specifically point to three lacunae in the present literature:

First, conditions of homophily or similarity are typically treated as structural phenomena and or are taken as given. References are made in passing to their social construction, but there is no elaboration of that process theoretically or empirically. A corollary oversight is the failure to incorporate agency into the model. The assertion of constructed similarity implies framing activity, which, in turn, inseminates framing agents into the dynamic. To date, however, emphasis on channels and varieties of institutional similarity or equivalence have tended to ‘deagentify’ the diffusion process as discussed in the movement literature. This takes us to a third oversight in the literature: the failure to explore the character and dynamics of diffusion when only the transmitter or the adopter takes an active role in the process, and/or when the conditions of similarity or compatibility are not given but are problematic and thus in need of construction (Snow and Benford 1999: 25).

They then suggest an alternative typology of transnational diffusion between social movements according to whether transmitters and receivers are actively or passively engaged in the process. Reciprocation involves active transmitters as well as active receivers. Adaptation involves passive transmitters and active receivers, accommodation active transmitters and passive receivers, and contagion passive transmitters as well as passive receivers (idem: table 2.1, 26). After pointing out that contagion does not apply to the spread of collective action, Snow and Benford proceed with empirical analyses of the three remaining types of transnational diffusion, illustrating how reciprocation produced linkages between the American and European peace movements, how adaptation characterized the appropriation of Western tactics by the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement, and how accommodation defined the dissemination of the Nichiren Shoshu Sokkagakai Buddhist movement from Japan to the United States (idem: 27-37). Through these case studies, they demonstrate that transnational diffusion may flow between culturally dissimilar groups of activists, and from non-Western to Western countries.
Like Snow and Bentord, I view transnational diffusion between social movements as a complex and highly “consequential” process that may be gradual, non-linear, and deeply rooted in local networks. Instead of assuming that diffusion only occurs along established lines of interaction, I focus on the continuous establishment of new—and reconstruction of existing—linkages between transmitters and receivers. Instead of treating diffusion as a separate mechanism, I argue that the brokerage and appropriation mechanisms may be key catalysts of diffusion. Although I acknowledge that the type of items, means, structural conditions, and mechanisms highlighted by leading contentious politics scholars often apply to cases with similar transmitters and receivers (e.g., American and German student activists or Dutch and German pacifists), I suggest that dissemination may also involve the non-linear flow of a comprehensive repertoire between significantly different transmitters and receivers, located in significantly different organizational, cultural, and political environments (e.g., Indian nationalists and American civil rights activists). Although similarity frequently breeds connection (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001: 415), the tendency toward “narcissism of minor differences” may actually preclude communication between transmitters and receivers despite structural equivalence and homophily (Blok 1998). At the same time, receivers may construct similarity with transmitters on a specific subject or in a particular situation without denying the persistence of significant differences between them and their contexts. The next section thus proposes a theoretical framework for studying transnational diffusion between similar as well as different social movements that avoids the presumption of homophily and stresses the collective agency (and collective “labor”) required for adoption of a foreign innovation. It seeks to extend the dominant contentious politics approach without neglecting the latter’s positive contributions.

III. Theoretical framework: extending the dominant contentious politics approach

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In fact, receivers may recognize that the diffusion item of transmitters is innovative precisely because it emerged and developed in a significantly different environment and involved significantly different actors. Instead of assuming that structural similarity is advantageous and structural difference is disadvantageous, therefore, I focus on the continuous need for interpretation and adaptation on the part of receivers, whether they resemble transmitters or not.
Unlike the classical diffusion model and the contentious politics approach, my non-linear theoretical framework suggests that transnational diffusion may involve specific routines as well as entire repertoires, and may occur between similar as well as different social movements. In particular, it proposes that: 1) the diffusion item may be multifaceted and flexible; 2) media and interpersonal channels in the "mainstream field of reception" initiate diffusion, but then may impede adoption by spreading stereotypical interpretations of the diffusion item; 3) only receiving "critical communities" are able to overcome hyper-difference and over-likeness obstacles by dislocating the diffusion item from its original setting and relocating it in their own settings; and 4) transnational diffusion may involve established lines of interaction as well as brokerage and collective appropriation mechanisms. Each layer of my theoretical framework enables as well as constrains the next layer. The multifaceted and flexible nature of the diffusion item draws the attention of receivers, but also increases the likelihood of misperceptions. The mainstream field of reception distributes relevant information about the diffusion item, but critical communities can only benefit from such information if they inflect it with oppositional meanings. And finally, critical communities that dislocate and relocate the diffusion item contribute positively to brokerage and collective appropriation, but at the same time these two relational mechanisms (which interact continually and recursively) can also limit critical communities' range of options (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 45). Before applying this approach empirically, however, let me first discuss the specific implications of each conceptual building block for my case study.

Whereas McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) regard the diffusion mechanism as distinct from the brokerage and appropriation mechanisms, therefore, I suggest that the latter two mechanisms may also be specific types of diffusion mechanisms. In other words, brokerage may allow diffusion to link "two or more currently unconnected social sites," while appropriation (or what I call collective appropriation) may allow diffusion to contribute to the collective identities and strategies needed for contentious interaction and mass mobilization (idem: 333, 47-48).
**Table 1. Comparing the classical diffusion model, the dominant contentious politics approach, and my non-linear theoretical framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classical diffusion theory</th>
<th>Contentious politics approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Diffusion item is well-defined, static, and finished</td>
<td>1) Diffusion item is a well-defined and singular performance, routine, or tactic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Distinction media and interpersonal channels: homophily transmitters-receivers</td>
<td>2) Distinction media and interpersonal channels: homophily transmitters-receivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Process is rapid and involves linear stages, predictable adoption rate, and two-step flow</td>
<td>3) Process is rapid and linear, and involves established lines of interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>4) Conducive similar receiving social system as prerequisite for diffusion</td>
<td>4) Conducive similar receiving social system as prerequisite for diffusion</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-linear theoretical framework</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Diffusion item may be a comprehensive, multifaceted, and flexible repertoire of contention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Mainstream field of reception may serve as a gateway, but also as a producer of hyper-difference and over-likeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Critical communities may eventually overcome these perceptual obstacles through the “labor” of dislocation and relocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Brokerage and collective appropriation mechanisms may enable constrain transnational diffusion between different social movements</td>
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</table>
Gandhian repertoire as multifaceted and flexible

Classical diffusion theorists seek to determine the essence of diffusion items by considering five internal attributes: relative advantage, compatibility, triability, observability, and complexity. As Charles Tilly (1978, 1986, 1995a, 1995b) points out, though, contentious repertoires are usually too multifaceted and flexible to depict in such static and reductionist terms. This certainly applies to the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent contention, which consisted of the action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language that Gandhian activists learned, shared, and implemented in their interactions with British rulers and other groups directly or indirectly involved in the Indian independence movement. The three dimensions were inextricably intertwined: discursive language often served to legitimate (or delegitimate) particular protest or organizational strategies, while the choice of action forms and organizational styles often derived from discursive positions. Far from separate entities, the pragmatic, institutional, and symbolic sides of the Gandhian repertoire actually implied each other.

The Gandhian action forms ranged from simple everyday tasks in Gandhi’s “ashrams” (or communes) to voluntary community service, from purification acts before public protest to participation in dramatic satyagraha campaigns like boycotts, strikes, noncooperation, or mass civil disobedience (Erikson 1969). The Gandhian repertoire not only called for courageous and “direct” action at specific historical moments, but also for enduring contributions to the “constructive program” before and after such transformative events. Far from a substitute for open resistance, therefore, the constructive program—which aimed at community development in urban areas and particularly rural villages—was a way to prepare for, benefit from, and implement the achievements of nonviolent direct action in the long run (Shridharani 1939). These forms of action were never pure or ideal, but occurred in the context of particular conditions within and outside of the Indian independence movement. They were products of actual collective struggle in

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1 For more on transformative events, see especially. Sahlins (1981), Sewell (1996a, 1996b), and McAdam and Sewell (2001).

2 In other words, the constructive program represented the long-term, continuous, and relatively invisible side of the Gandhian repertoire, while nonviolent direct action represented the shorter-term, contingent, and dramatic side of the Gandhian repertoire. For more on the link between “abeyance structures” and social movement continuity, on the one hand, and mass mobilization and the dramatic phase of social movements, on the other, see e.g. Verta Taylor (1989).
India, not inevitable results of individual genius or cultural traditions (Sharp 1960; Bondurant 1971; Fox 1989; McAdam and Tarrow 2000; Arnold 2001).

Similarly, the Gandhian repertoire’s organizational styles spanned the entire spectrum from formal and permanent organizations to informal and ad hoc associations. Gandhi stressed that each participating group had to be open towards supporters and critics; inclusive in terms of religious affiliation, status, ideology, and mass involvement; and strict about the steps preceding direct action and the rules of behavior (Shridharani 1939; Bondurant 1971). As long as organizations or associations obeyed these guidelines and contributed positively to the implementation of the Gandhian repertoire, Gandhi favored their involvement in the Indian independence movement. In short, the Gandhian repertoire’s organizational styles varied according to the specific situation, the level of discipline among the Indian people, and the degree of urgency (Owen 1971; Arnold 2001).

And finally, the Gandhian repertoire’s discursive language—as expressed through texts, rituals, and symbols—sought to transcend conceptual dichotomies that most Western and Indian thinkers considered unassailable. It attacked the religion, institutions, and ideology of the British Empire in India, while simultaneously appealing to the sympathy of British rulers and people (Hutchins 1967). It asserted the importance of religious morals and spiritual beliefs, but also actively engaged in the “dirty” game of politics. It promoted emotions like love, self-sacrifice, and compassion, on the one hand, and “scientific” experiments with hand spinning, dieting, and direct action, on the other. It stressed the supreme value of individual autonomy and private life as well as the imperative of public life and voluntary service to society. It posited the superiority of nonviolence, but, at the same time, preferred violence above cowardice or passivity. It recognized the need for inspired leadership, but emphasized the interests of the poor masses. Depending on the situation or his audience, Gandhians highlighted different aspects of their eclectic discursive language: in certain cases, they aimed at disciplining Indian nationalists or gaining sympathy from the British or American public; in other cases, they directly confronted the authorities. Like Gandhian forms of action and organizational styles, therefore, Gandhian discursive language was flexible and responsive to contemporary developments in the social, economic, political, and cultural

None of these action forms, organizational styles, or discursive messages was unique or unprecedented in itself: civil disobedience campaigns, ashrams, and moral political language were common long before Gandhi rose to prominence. What made the Gandhian repertoire distinctive and innovative was the meaning assigned to each particular routine (emphasizing nonviolent means and truthful ends) and the fact that, unlike previous types of nonviolent protest (which tended to involve passive or strictly individual types of resistance), it involved routine “constructive” work as well as transitory “direct” action on a mass scale. Finally and most importantly, the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent contention was new because it moved beyond the “moderate” repertoire of appeals and petitions within the existing power structure, on the one hand, and the “extremist” repertoire of sporadic terrorism and fiery rhetoric against the status quo, on the other. Although Gandhi appreciated the reform efforts of Indian moderates and the courage of Indian extremists—and tried to include them in the national independence movement—he emphasized that his approach transcended both camps (Gandhi 1938; Kumar 1971; Rudolph and Rudolph 1983; Arnold 2001). The Gandhian repertoire was one possible alternative to the two traditional repertoires of collective action that had historically predominated in India as well as in South Africa and the United States (although in somewhat different forms).

The Gandhian repertoire derived its meaning from three basic concepts: “satya” or truth, “ahimsa” or non-violence, and “tapas” or self-suffering. Together, these notions formed the core concept in Gandhi’s philosophy and praxis: “satyagraha” (e.g., Gandhi 1928; Diwakar 1946; Bondurant 1971; Iyer 1973; Sharp 1973; Rudolph and Rudolph 1983; Dalton 1993; Fox 1989; Parekh 1989; Arnold 2001). Satya reflected, on the one hand, the traditional Hindu aspiration toward self-realization, occurring when someone comes face to face with the absolute, that is, with God or Truth. On the other hand, however, Gandhi reinterpreted this traditional view by stressing that no human can actually grasp the absolute. In reality, he argued, an individual can only experience glimpses of a relative truth, by means of “numerous experiments with truth.” God and Truth, for Gandhi, were convertible terms (Hick 1999).

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Ahimsa represented the means to advance toward the end of satya. Since the end was absolute (and humanly impossible to realize), Gandhi contended that the only practical means of knowing God—and, therefore, Truth—was through nonviolence. Unlike the orthodox Hindu notion, however, the Gandhian perception of ahimsa was explicitly positive and active: like the Greek concept of “agape,” it implied the application of love in social life. With regard to the intricate relationship between Truth and nonviolence, and between ends and means, Gandhi wrote:

...without ahimsa it is not possible to seek and find Truth. Ahimsa and Truth are so intertwined that it is practically impossible to disentangle and separate them. They are like the two sides of a coin, or rather of a smooth unstamped metallic disc. Who can say, which is the obverse, and which is the reverse? Nevertheless ahimsa is the means; Truth is the end. Means to be means must always be within our reach, and so ahimsa is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question (Gandhi 1945: 8, quoted in Bondurant 1971: 24-25).

Thus, in his eyes, nonviolence was a practical prerequisite for engaging in deliberate social experiments with Truth and God, both in daily life and collective action.

Expressing nonviolence openly (whether in private or in public) involved tapas or self-suffering, with the intention of morally persuading the hearts of opponents and bystanders. Tapas, in the Indian context, juxtaposed nonviolent emotions like love, compassion, courage, commitment, and humility on the part of Gandhian activists with “rational” justifications for colonization, exploitation and domination provided by British or other Western observers. By actively demonstrating the Indian population’s moral and religious righteousness, Gandhi hoped to appeal to the goodwill of individual rulers and thereby undermine the subversive logic of an evil system. “The heart,” he once remarked, “accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Argument follows conviction. Man often finds reason in support of whatever he does or wants to do” (Young India, November 1925). At the same time, he also felt that self-suffering required a great deal of common sense, rationality, discipline, and training. In other words, Gandhi believed that Indian adherence to tapas through cognitive self-control and “intelligent” emotions would elicit both the immorality of the colonial system and the humanity of British officials.
These three concepts were the building blocks of satyagraha, the underlying concept in the Gandhian repertoire.²" Literally, the word meant "holding fast to truth." but its most common translations into English were truth force and soul force.

Satyagraha appropriated and reinterpreted familiar ideas in Western philosophy and Hindu orthodoxy. Although it resembled the Western notion of "passive resistance," which legitimated the expedient use of nonviolence by groups lacking the capacity to employ violence, Gandhi clearly stated that it was a method for the strong and the brave, not a "weapon of the weak." Moreover, while it borrowed from age-old Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist conceptualizations of nonviolence, satyagraha translated their negative definitions of "non-injury" or "harmlessness" into, what Gandhi called, "a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer." Doing good to the evil-doer, Gandhi added, "does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of Ahimsa, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically" (Young India, January 19, 1921). Besides inflecting existing terms with new meaning, satyagraha was also innovative because it explicitly declared the need for massive, nonviolent direct action as a complement to community service at the grassroots level. The purpose of satyagraha was always concrete, structural transformation in the public arena, never mere spiritual, religious, or ethical purity in private life (Nandy 1987; Hick 1999).

Even (or perhaps especially) on native soil, Gandhi and the Gandhian repertoire never went uncontested. Particularly after the first nationwide satyagraha campaigns in India, orthodox Hindus, Marxist extremest, and moderate liberals continuously criticized Gandhi and his methods. Some contemporaries felt that his style of activism was not radical enough and underestimated the religious or economic disparities in Indian society; others, in contrast, believed that his approach was too militant and actually caused unnecessary conflicts between faiths and classes. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for instance, objected to Gandhi's intimate ties with moderate leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale and his unconventional interpretations of Hinduism (Brown 1961: 59-95), while communist

² Hereafter I use satyagraha and the Gandhian repertoire interchangeably, although the former term is more philosophical and historically precedes the latter.
revolutionary Manabendra Nath Roy regarded satyagraha as a reactionary ideology (Dalton 1993: 78-89). Cosmopolitan poet Rabindranath Tagore, on his part, argued that Gandhi’s ideal of universal harmony contradicted his support of Indian nationalism (idem: 67-78), whereas Theosophist Annie Besant believed in the spiritual and racial superiority of Hindu India rather than Gandhi’s multicultural and oecumenical perspective (van der Veer 2001: 64-65, 74-77, 126-127; Iyer 1973: 42-45). Currently, moreover, Indian historians are increasingly questioning the leadership of Gandhi and the contributions of Gandhian nonviolence. Members of the Subaltern Studies school, for example, view Gandhi’s role as representative of the rural masses and the untouchables, his relationship with the Indian National Congress and the bourgeoisie, and his adherence to satyagraha under (almost) all circumstances as problematic (Arnold 2001: 4–11; Hardiman 1981, 1996; Pandey 1982; Chatterjee 1984, 1986; Amin 1984, 1995; Guha 1992, 1997).

My aim in this dissertation, however, is not to justify or oppose Gandhi’s own personality, beliefs, decisions, philosophical ideas, or actions in relation to his contemporaries. Rather, I want to concentrate on the Gandhian repertoire as a relatively autonomous set of collective action routines that surfaced in South Africa, developed in India, and eventually came to the United States. Although Gandhi was indisputably its author, I argue that the Gandhian repertoire—with all its contradictions, imperfections, and ambiguities—evolved into a comprehensive, multifaceted, and flexible diffusion item that existed independently from the whims of one individual, no matter how admirable or despicable (Nandy 1987; Fox 1989, 1997).

Mainstream field of reception: hyper-difference and over-likeness in the US media

The multifaceted and flexible nature of the Gandhian repertoire ensured that its dissemination beyond national borders was an arduous (but not impossible) process, full of non-linear twists and turns, requiring a great deal of interpretive and practical “labor” on the part of receivers (Fox 1997; Scalmer 2002). From the start, the Gandhian repertoire entered the receiving country through its mainstream “field of reception,” an interactional and communicative sphere where receiving persons and media came
together to debate and report on the diffusion item. Although opinion leaders were
important, the mass media (initially primarily newspapers and journals, later also
television) represented the mainstream field of reception’s central forum. Mainstream
opinion leaders generally derived their status and reputation from their access to the mass
media, which spread their views on the Gandhian repertoire to a wider audience.
Contrary to classical diffusion theory, therefore, I argue that media discourse was an
accurate reflection of the mainstream public’s perception of the diffusion item (Gamson
1992). But, again contrary to classical diffusion theory, I also argue that the mainstream
field of reception’s contribution to transnational diffusion was ambiguous at best: while it
helped set the transnational diffusion process in motion, it also impeded the kind of
interpretive and practical labor needed for full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire
in the United States.

For American receivers interested in the Gandhian repertoire, information
provided by the mainstream media and its contributors was tainted, because of the latter’s
distaste for radical transformations (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Kielbowitz and Scherer
1986; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Iyengar 1991; Smith,
McCarthy, and McPhail 2001). While the conservative spokespeople and press in
mainstream America overtly opposed Gandhi’s brand of nonviolent resistance, their
liberal counterparts (both white and African-American) only favored nonviolent
resistance if it confirmed traditional American ideals, aimed at gradual political reform
within the existing power structure, and did not represent a fundamental threat to the
status quo. Thus, even “sympathetic” representatives of mainstream opinion tended to
discourage American adoption of the Gandhian repertoire by de-politicizing and
otherwise downplaying its militant implications. They expressed admiration for Gandhi
and his methods, but only after presenting him as a moderate and satyagraha as a means
for political reform rather than structural change (von Eschen 1997).

The mainstream field of reception obstructed adoption by popularizing two
contrasting stereotypes of the Gandhian repertoire: hyper-difference and over-likeness.
Hyper-difference, according to Richard Fox (1997: 67), “depends on a magnification of

For more on the field concept, see especially, Bourdieu (1990), Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992),
difference, a supposition that a cultural practice located elsewhere cannot travel anywhere else," while over-likeness indicates that admiration for a foreign culture or innovation "may minimize real contrasts and may so wash out difference that we see similarity when it is not there." The former stereotype, popular among the conservative media and its representatives, implied that the Gandhian repertoire could only work in a traditional, oriental, spiritualistic country like India, not in a modern, occidental, rationalistic country like the United States; the latter stereotype, favored by the moderate and African-American media, acknowledged the admirable qualities in the Gandhian repertoire, but asserted that these derived from familiar American thinkers such as Thoreau and closely resembled age-old Christian forms of nonviolent resistance. Although the mainstream field of reception served as the Gandhian repertoire's gate of entry, therefore, it actually impeded full implementation in the American context.

Critical communities: dislocation from India and relocation in the US

Only American receivers willing to interpret the diffusion item in alternative ways—in ways that challenged the dominant perspectives in the mainstream field of reception—were capable of overcoming mainstream stereotypes and learning enough about satyagraha to adopt it in their own temporal and geographical settings. Since the Gandhian repertoire was a collective action repertoire, moreover, these alternative receivers belonged to what Thomas Rochon (1998: 22) calls critical communities: relatively small networks of heterodox thinkers and activists (either within formal organizations or informal associations) who "have developed a sensitivity to some problem, an analysis of the sources of the problem, and a prescription for what should be done about the problem." As receivers, critical community members were united by a shared discourse on the Gandhian repertoire and they developed alternative interpersonal and media channels to spread their views on it."

22 The critical community concept is closely related to concepts such as "submerged networks" (Melucci 1989, 1996), "abeyance structures" (Taylor 1989), "free spaces" (Evans and Boyte 1986; Polletta 1999), "movement halfway houses" (Morris 1984), and "subaltern counterpublics" (Fraser 1992). I have chosen to use the term critical community, because it allows for a clear distinction from the social movement concept (critical communities may become, yet are not always or necessarily, part of a social movement) without implying insulation from the mainstream field of reception—as submerged networks and free spaces tend to do—and without implying that all counterpublics are necessarily subaltern. Furthermore, I regard abeyance structures and movement halfway houses as specific types of critical communities that are
Although critical communities generated and communicated heterodox views on the Gandhian repertoire, they always remained connected to the mainstream field of reception. On the one hand, critical community members derived much of their information about the diffusion item from mainstream opinion leaders and media. Unlike most Americans, however, they inflected these mainstream reports and perspectives with oppositional meaning and used this knowledge to develop their own arguments and methods (Bakhtin 1981, 1986; Terdiman 1989; Steinberg 1999). On the other hand, critical community members did not develop alternative ideas in isolation, but aimed at altering the general public’s perception of the Gandhian repertoire and its implications. Far from remaining on the sidelines of public life, they deliberately targeted the mainstream field of reception and tried to influence the dominant values of American society.

Given their active involvement in public life, it is not surprising that many American critical communities at one time or another took part in a social movement. As Rochon (1998: 31) points out, though, critical community and social movement are not equivalent concepts:

The critical community is interested primarily in the development of new values; the movement is interested in winning social and political acceptance for those values. While the critical community operates mainly through communication within a network of people engaged in conceptual clarification and empirical analysis of a problem, the primary tools of the movement lie in collective action. . . . Movement leaders take an active role in choosing, bundling together, and shaping the ideas of one or more critical communities, in such a way as to maximize the chances of movement success. . . . But not all cultural innovations developed in critical communities are equally suited to motivating collective action. As a result, there are many more critical communities than there are movements.

Whereas critical communities contribute to cultural change through “oppositional” discourse (Hall 1973), social movements employ such “oppositional” discourse to mobilize sustained, confrontational, and unconventional direct action aimed at structural transformation in the social and political arenas (Tarrow 1994). While all social movements include critical communities, therefore, not all critical communities particularly relevant in constructing or preserving the interpersonal ties required for the mobilization of a social movement. Finally, I argue that some critical communities emphasize the importance of communication and experimentation in free spaces, while others do not.
participate in social movements (Rochon 1998: 52-53; see also, Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

In part, the collective identity and strategy of each critical community depended on the relationships it constructed with the mainstream field of reception and the social movements in its particular context. Some critical communities invoked the diffusion item to confirm collective identities and strategies seeking gradual reform within the existing social and political system. These receiving groups did not challenge the American mainstream or participate in social movements, but merely employed Gandhian discursive language to legitimize existing ideas and practices without promoting applications of Gandhian action forms and organizational styles in the United States. Obviously, the role of such critical communities in the transnational diffusion process was brief and limited. Other critical communities, in contrast, adopted the diffusion item to reconstitute their collective identities and strategies, and sought radical transformation of the existing social and political system. These receiving groups openly challenged the American mainstream and, either directly or indirectly, supported social movements like the labor, the pacifist, and especially the civil rights movement. They adopted Gandhian discursive language to popularize and/or initiate Gandhian action forms and organizational styles in the American context, and consequently played an enduring and highly significant role in the transnational diffusion process.

The latter type of critical community performed two functions that were crucial for the diffusion item’s passage from India to the United States. First of all, they transcended the hyper-difference and over-likeness stereotypes by uprooting satyagraha from its place of origin, highlighting its innovative implications, and showing how it could work in other cultures and other parts of the world. As indicated earlier, Fox refers to this process as dislocation and argues that it primarily implied intellectual and

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23 I agree with Francesca Polletta and James Jasper (2001: 14) that: “Collective identity describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries. It is fluid and relational, emerging out of interactions with a number of different audiences (bystanders, allies, opponents, news media, state authorities), rather than fixed. It channels words and actions, enabling some claims and deeds but delegitimizing others. It provides categories by which individuals divide up and make sense of the world.” And like Craig Calhoun (1991: 52), I emphasize that identity requires constant (re)construction: “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.”
Theological translation of the Gandhian repertoire into discursive terms that American receivers could understand and, subsequently, convert into concrete collective action. Based on such cultural dislocation, certain critical communities then enabled satyagraha’s relocation to the United States by actually experimenting with it in their own settings. Besides intellectual and theological efforts, this non-linear process involved considerable physical “labor,” moral commitment, “artful” reinvention, and practical creativity on the part of critical community members (Fox 1997: 75-80; Joas 1996; Jasper 1997; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Scalmer 2000, 2002; Fligstein 2001; Chabot 2002a).

Transnational diffusion mechanisms: brokerage and collective appropriation

The critical communities at the forefront of dislocation and relocation made history, but not always under conditions they could control. Adapting the conceptualization of McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 22-28, 102-107, 47-48), I highlight two relational mechanisms—brokerage and collective appropriation—that enabled as well as constrained receivers’ ability to adopt the Gandhian repertoire at any one time and in any one place. On the one hand, the brokerage mechanism represented the formation of new or consolidation of old ties among transmitters and receivers; on the other hand, the collective appropriation mechanism reflected the ways in which receiving critical communities applied (or failed to apply) the diffusion item to modify their collective identities and strategies. In my case, brokerage contributed to a transnational network connecting Indians with Americans and a domestic Gandhian infrastructure in the United States, while collective appropriation involved the translation of knowledge about the Gandhian repertoire into organized and collective experiments taking place in the context of free spaces and or direct action campaigns in the United States. In short, these two relational mechanisms helped (re)construct the lines of interaction between Indian and American critical communities that eventually, after various unpredictable twists and

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*With McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 26), I regard relational mechanisms as those mechanisms that “alter connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks.” For more on relational approaches and mechanisms, see especially Gergen (1994), Somers (1994, 1998), Goodwin and Emirbayer (1994), Emirbayer (1997), Sheller (2001), and Diani and McAdam (2002).*
turns, led to the full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire during the American civil rights movement.25

These diffusion mechanisms not only enabled and constrained critical community members: critical community members also (re)activated and guided them. When brokerage and collective appropriation reinforced each other and stimulated intellectual dislocation or active relocation, they contributed positively to the transnational diffusion process. When brokerage and collective appropriation inhibited each other and impeded dislocation or relocation, however, they had a negative effect on the transnational diffusion process. Thus, diffusion mechanisms were dynamic, fluid, unpredictable, and non-linear: they did not adhere to the law-like two-step flow hypothesis, rigid adopter categories, and linear stages of classical diffusion theory, but varied considerably over time and space (Sheller 2001).

As I alluded to before, these diffusion mechanisms involved transnational as well as domestic brokerage, synchronous as well as intergenerational brokerage. My empirical analysis will highlight how travel, correspondence, publications, and speeches helped produce cross-border relationships between Indian transmitters and American receivers, while connections between receiving critical communities allowed for the construction of a Gandhian infrastructure within the United States. It will also show that brokerage was strongest when it linked contemporary with older critical community members. In both cases, it was the specific “property” and “effect” of a relational tie—its emotional characteristics and practical implications—that mattered, not just its presence, structure, or strength.26 Depending on the situation, some social networks encouraged activists to engage in collective protest, while others discouraged it. Some activists, moreover, responded positively to their social networks, while others ignored them (Kitts 2000: 242; Chabot 2002b).27

25 Because of these two relational mechanisms, in other words, diffusion did not only take place along established lines of interaction—as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 333) suggest—but also involved: (1) the continuous creation of new connections and revitalization of old connections between transmitters and receivers, and (2) continuous changes in the ways that American critical communities responded to and experimented with the Gandhian repertoire in their own context.


Finally, transnational diffusion involved collective appropriation in enduring “free spaces” as well as in direct action campaigns. In my particular study, collective appropriation in free spaces— that is, in “settings between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision” (Evans and Boyte 1986: 17)—consisted of gradual and constructive experimentations with the Gandhian repertoire outside of the public limelight, taking place in universities, churches, training centers, and rural communities (see also, Polletta 1999). Collective appropriation in direct action campaigns, in contrast, entailed applications of the Gandhian repertoire’s discursive language, action forms, and organizational styles in the context of dramatic contentious events. Again, it was the specific type of implementation—the level of oppositional content, intensity, and solidarity displayed during protest campaigns—that gave this mechanism substance, not merely the number of activists or the size of organizations involved (Chabot 2002b).

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The value of my theoretical framework depends on how I implement it. The following chapters, therefore, apply the four building blocks outlined above to a wide range of empirical material on the Gandhian repertoire’s transnational diffusion. Chapter two illustrates how satyagraha originated in South Africa and developed into a multifaceted and flexible repertoire of nonviolent contention during the Indian independence movement. The next five chapters trace the American reception of the Gandhian repertoire between 1919 and 1965, depicting the mainstream field of contention, critical communities, diffusion mechanisms, and their interrelationships in each historical period. Chapter three focuses on the inception of the transnational diffusion process as well as the perceptual stereotypes that emerged; chapter four on the preliminary yet highly significant dislocation efforts by a select few critical community members; chapter five on the creative reinvention of the Gandhian repertoire enabling its relocation in specific American contexts; chapter six on the retreat in the transnational diffusion process during the early-Cold War years; and chapter seven on the unexpected full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire during the American civil rights movement.
In conclusion, chapter eight reviews the empirical findings of the previous chapters and explores whether my theoretical framework is suitable for studying recent global processes or other cases of transnational diffusion between social movements (Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; see also, Scalmer 2000, 2002). Can my theoretical framework explain how transnational diffusion relates to globalization processes? Can it contribute positively to the treatment of contemporary contentious repertoires and their transnational diffusion? Does it enable researchers to capture diverse directions of flow? And most importantly, does it allow for a more balanced perspective on transnational diffusion between similar as well as different social movements throughout the world?