CORRUPTION AND COGNITIVE LIBERATION IN RUSSIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM: A POLITICAL PROCESS APPROACH TO SOCIAL MOVEMENT DECLINE

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Following reforms in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s, a large environmental movement erupted across the nation. At the time, it was the largest and most powerful critical group in the repressive regime. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the environmental movement fell back into abeyance. This paper investigates the reasons for the collapse of the Russian environmental movement using a revised political process model that emphasizes cognitive liberation as a principle variable. I suggest that cognitive liberation is based upon grounded knowledge and social trust: as corruption and lawlessness increased in the post-transition years, people's sense of efficacy decreased. Moreover, I argue that the political opportunity structure operates dialogically with cognitive liberation. Elites were able to close political opportunities in the 2000s because cognitive liberation among the general population had already been demoralized in the 1990s.

Introduction

While scholars have examined many different aspects of social movements, surprisingly little attention has been paid to social movement decline (Kamenitsa 1998, Goodwin and Jasper 2003, Owens 2009). The Russian environmental movement provides a useful case study for examining and theorizing demobilization because of its precipitous fall from a growing mass movement in the late 1980s to a barely-visible shadow of itself in the post-transition years.

In this article, I apply and modestly extend the political process model (McAdam 1982), giving particular attention to *cognitive liberation,* or the belief in the potential efficacy of collective action. I suggest that cognitive liberation is fostered not only by the subjective interpretation of macro-level political opportunities, but is also created or quelled by *grounded knowledge:* that is, by knowledge gained from reflexive, lived, personal experience. In Russia, grounded knowledge of pervasive institutional corruption promotes widespread social distrust and a fatalistic apathy. I argue that insufficient attention has been given to institutional corruption and its deadening affect on cognitive liberation in explaining the decline of the Russian environmental movement, and social movements more generally in the region. Social movements depend upon a strong sense of efficacy among the populace; in contemporary Russia, corruption and its concomitant lawlessness drain citizens of their belief in collective power by weakening social trust, and this stymies the sustenance of social movements. Under conditions of social apathy and public withdrawal, it becomes easier for state actors to assert power and curb gains made during periods of greater social activism. With an inert public offering little opposition, the state can close the political opportunity structure and further diminish the capabilities of social movements.

Theories of Social Movement Decline

This study of social movement decline attends to a substantive area that has been largely ignored in the past.[1] While social movement scholars have carefully considered the causes of mobilization, at both the macro and micro levels, much less attention has been given to the causes of social movement decline. The dearth of literature on social movement decline would lead one to consider two questionable assumptions being made about social movement activity.

The first assumption revolves around the axiom: "What goes up must come down." According to this assumption, movements are an anomaly: their appearance needs to be explained, but their disappearance is a mere reversion to "normal" conditions. To the extent that movements exist, they are there to grease the gears of society and ameliorate problems or contradictions in the social structure (Alexander 2006). A more intense version of single-issue politics, this view sees movements as having singular demands, and movements naturally demobilize when the demand is met or the cause is lost. The waxing and waning of social movement activity is not viewed as inherently problematic because the movement appears to coalesce around a particular issue or campaign. So the successful passage of the 19th Amendment would be a natural end to the women's suffrage movement or the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act in 1964 and 1965 would explain the diminishing of the Black civil rights movement.

A second assumption, which stands in opposition to the first, is the idea that movements never fully demobilize. Specific campaigns give the impression of separate movements, but the movement itself may be viewed as an overarching macrosocial phenomenon. Rather than delimiting a "suffrage movement" and an "equal rights movement," we can recognize a trans-

[1] Social movement decline has been relatively neglected, not totally ignored. For example, cases of decline have been examined in Epstein 2001, Sexton 2001, Voss 1996, Edwards and Marullo 1995, and Owens 2009.

historical Women's Movement. According to this perspective, decline is not theorized; instead, continuity is.[2] The idea of continuity was first introduced by Verta Taylor in her study of feminist activism during a period of demobilization – a period she referred to as "social movement abeyance" (Taylor 1989). Her consideration of movement downtime, what she and Rupp (1987) refer to as "the doldrums," provides an important understanding of the connections between peaks or waves of mobilization. They reference the hostile context in which the movement is embedded, but they do not theorize reasons for the decline itself. Rupp and Taylor's recognition of trans-historical movements was certainly an improvement on the "success-failure assumption," and their theories do apply to the Russian environmental movement, insofar as committed cells of activists continue their work to this day as a movement in abeyance. But the assumption of low-intensity continuity fails to adequately explain decline itself.

I have outlined two assumptions that appear to underlie the academic neglect of social movement decline. However, there has been much scholarship on movement mobilization, and implicit within a theory of growth is a theory of decline. Simply by inverting the requirements for mobilization one can produce the expected conditions for demobilization according to extant theory. Below, I will consider the theory of social movement decline embedded within each of the major strands of social movement mobilization theory today and then briefly consider them either on their own merits, or in the context of the Russian environmental movement.

Classical "Strain" Theories: Early considerations of social movements, often called the classical or strain theories, suggested that social movements were an aberrant form of social

[2] This is not to say movements are assumed to be homogenous over time; continuity here is questioning the assumed equation of movement decline with movement death, but leaving decline itself largely unexplored.

behavior. Social movements were considered to be mobs, characterized by a herd mentality (Le Bon 1995). Those who participated were assumed to be psychologically unbalanced, often due some form of "strain" imposed social breakdown or *anomie* (Smelser 1962). While the aberrant psychological explanation of social movements has been generally dismissed by contemporary social movement scholars, some scholars continue to emphasize the importance of strain, social breakdown, worsening conditions or suddenly imposed grievances in the mobilization of a movement (Snow, Cress, Downey and Jones 1998, McVeigh 1999, Useem 1985, Walsh 1981).

If strain were the instigator of movement activity, then the primary reason for movement decline would be the easing of that strain. The problem with such a theory of decline is empirical: many movements continue to mobilize after the successful resolution of the original galvanizing problem. For example, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has seemed to build its movement on its own success, growing as an organization even as the number of alcohol-related traffic fatalities has decreased by nearly half since its founding.[3]

The strain theory of decline is particularly problematic in contemporary Russia. While environmental movements may have mobilized due to the worsening conditions of economic and political stagnation in the 1980s, the strained conditions of the late Soviet period pale in comparison to those of the post-Soviet 1990s. In the years immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the majority of Russians witnessed their standard of living suddenly plummet. Industry collapsed, the government was bankrupt, crime exploded, life expectancy dropped; in other words, we could expect peak levels of social movement activity according to classical and neo-classical models. Instead, this is precisely when social movements in Russia

[3] http://www.madd.org/Drunk-Driving/Drunk-Driving/Statistics.aspx

began to dissipate. Given Russia's high levels of material deprivation and *anomie* in the post-Soviet era, movement decline was certainly not due to alleviation of strain.

Resource Mobilization: The basic premise of resource mobilization theory is that movements are resource-dependent. McCarthy and Zald's (1977) early articulation of the theory suggests that movements, like businesses, compete with one another for limited resources in a social movement "sector." They assume that resources would come from external elite support, and the ability to garner that support would be the key to successful movement mobilization. Subsequent scholars have built on the theory by emphasizing the ability of movements to cultivate indigenous resources (Morris 1981), rather than external, elite support; but the importance of raising resources is still central to movement success.

The resource mobilization theory of decline would imply that organizations which had previously succeeded in raising resources were suddenly unable to do so. An example of this decline theory is implicit in Haines' (1984) elaboration of the radical flank effect. In his study, the more radical Civil Rights organizations began to dissipate as their income from donations dwindled, while donations to more moderate organizations grew. The weakness of the resource mobilization theory of decline is also clear in Haines' article: while lessened resources and demobilization may be correlated, the relationship between them is likely spurious. Some other factor is probably at work in a movement that goes from resource-rich to resource-poor to cause the transformation. For instance: the "radical" ideological change in some Civil Rights organizations caused the drop in resources and subsequently caused decline.

Political Opportunity Structure: Another popular theory of social movement mobilization involves the political conditions in which the movement forms (Eisinger 1973, Jenkins and Perrow 1977, Huntington 1968, Lipset 1963, Lipsky 1970, Meyer 1993, Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Opportunities take a variety of forms, but some indicators might be: power struggles amongst elites, constituency demographic changes, new laws or policies, or even changes in international relations. Opportunities arise that enable the formation of movements where such activity previously had been prevented or oppressed.

The natural inverse of political opportunity structure that would predict or explain social movement decline would be the closing of a political opportunity that had previously been open to a movement. The weakness inherent in this theory of decline is similar to that of resource mobilization: the closing of a previously opened opportunity may have a spurious correlation to decline. Opportunities may close *because* a movement is *already* weakened or on the wane.[4] In Russia, there is evidence of state repression and closed opportunity structures, which I will discuss in more detail later, but these do not come into play until the late 1990s, whereas movement decline occurred in the early post-Soviet years, while formal opportunities were still relatively fluid.

Cultural Theories: Since the "cultural turn" in social movement studies, a number of theories began to address the semiotic and hermeneutic work of social movements. The most prevalent of such theories has been framing theory (Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford 1986, Benford and Snow 2000); however, scholars have also explored narrative (Polletta 2006, Davis

[4] Except perhaps in the case of outright and total violent repression by an authoritarian regime.

2001) and identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001, Taylor and Whittier 1992) in association with movement activity. In terms of mobilization, cultural theories have relied upon discursive struggles to raise the salience of a particular frame, narrative or identity among the general public or a certain community within that public. Successful mobilization depends upon finding resonance between a certain argument, position or story and a pre-existing sentiment in the broader culture: a meta-narrative.

A cultural theory of decline would hypothesize that a movement would lose momentum if its meaning-work ceased to find resonance in the larger culture. This could be due to a failure to "counterframe" the opposition, or failure to "reframe" in response to a powerful counterframe (Benford and Hunt 2003). It could also be that a movement failed to "strategically adapt" to an altered context (McCammon et al 2008). While cultural explanations have contributed much to the study of social movements, it would be folly to ignore the very real and rapid structural change in Russia during the period of movement decline. Attributing "agency" to movements caught in the maelstrom of total society change – politically, economically and ideologically – may unintentionally blame movements for a decline that was largely beyond their control.

Given the weakness of each theory alone, I suggest that theories of mobilization may not be adequate to fully account for decline. To demobilize from a heightened period of activity is not due to a solitary variable, but rather to a cascading series of causes and consequences, each interrelating with one another. For this reason, I suggest that political process theory may be used to successfully explain social movement decline due to its unique ability to incorporate economic, political and symbolic-subjective components, and explore how these forces interact in the social sphere conjunctively through time. Political process already has a long and respected history in social movements literature, but it is most commonly associated with

movement mobilization. Yet the theory, as it was employed by McAdam (1982), can also be used to explain social movement decline (McAdam 1982: 181-229). One variable may be more salient in growth and another in decline, but none act singly in the social movement life-cycle.

Political Process Theory

Political process theory was elaborated by Doug McAdam in his 1982 book *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970.* What set political process theory apart from other prevalent theories of its time, like strain theory, resource mobilization theory and political opportunity structure, was the emphasis McAdam placed on unfolding processes throughout history. While other studies looked at movements as snapshots, often taken at their peak mobilization, McAdam's theory called for a truly longitudinal study of social movement development and decline. As the title of the book makes clear, McAdam's own application of political process to the southern Civil Rights movement spans a minimum of 40 years, although portions of his historical analysis date back to 1876 with the end of Reconstruction.

Another key aspect of political process theory is that it is not a monolateral-deterministic approach to prediction, but is rather a synthesizing theory that accounts for the interaction of a variety of social factors, all of which operate in the promotion or prohibition of social movement activity. There is not one, all-powerful variable that determines movement success or failure (i.e. resources, organization, salient frames, divided elites, elite support); instead, political process examines the dynamic interplay of variables in historically contingent spaces of action.

Specifically, McAdam's political process model is a tripartite theory that emphasizes political opportunities, indigenous organization and cognitive liberation as the primary inputs in

social movement formation. Broad, historical and evolving socioeconomic processes situate these principle variables.

Of the three variables, political opportunity has received the most scholarly attention; so much so that political process theory has frequently been reduced to political opportunities alone in regression models testing the theory, and it has been accused of having a "structural bias," with its emphasis on political opportunities overly determining of human behavior and outcomes (Goodwin, Jasper and Khattra 1999). Indigenous organization, which encompasses such categories as networks, leadership, members, and resources, had already been much-studied by social movement scholars when McAdam incorporated it into political process theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977, Morris 1981), and subsequent studies have continued to focus on these key variables (e.g. Cress and Snow 1996, Minkoff and McCarthy 2005). Thus, political process theory synthesizes the important contributions of political opportunity, resource mobilization and social network theorists.

Less well studied is the final component of McAdam's model: *cognitive liberation*.[5] In their book, *Poor People's Movements,* Piven and Cloward (1977) acknowledge the fatalism with which most people view their social environments. They posit that some mental shift, which they call *transvaluation,* is necessary to overcome fatalism and inspire people to take action. McAdam finds that mental shift in the subjective interpretation of political opportunities. As McAdam writes, political opportunities and indigenous organization only provide the "structural potential" for movements. "Mediating between opportunity and action are people and the subjective meanings they attach to their situations" (McAdam 1982: 48). Cognitive liberation, then, is the collective recognition that a problem exists and a collective belief in the efficacy of

[5] For framing theory applied to cognitive liberation, however, see Nepstad 1997 and Futrell 2003. For cognitive liberation and emotions, see Jasper 1998.

social action to fix this problem. In this manner, political process theory has incorporated the subjective into its analysis of political opportunities and resources. Too often, studies of social movements test the subjective and structural against one another, as though the social world could only be limited to a strict constructivism or a structural determinism. Political process theory accounts for both, even going so far as to say that the two are interdependent in the life-course of a movement.[6]

Theorizing Cognitive Liberation

In the rush to test political opportunities and organizational structure, the cognitive liberation component of political process theory fell off the map of scholarly terrain. The subjective had to be rediscovered in the recent "cultural turn" in social movement scholarship. Yet cognitive liberation provides important theoretical elements that framing and other subjective analytic components do not. First, by focusing on *belief* in efficacy, cognitive liberation becomes inherently interactive and reflexive. Cognitive liberation cannot be manufactured or strategically deployed; it can only emerge in a feedback cycle between a particular population, its lived experience, and its subjective interpretation of those experiences. Framing, it would seem, is more likely to become salient only after a population comes to understand the goals of a movement as reasonable and achievable. It is a natural fit with the pluralist ideal of American political culture and the functional democracies of Western Europe where freedom of speech and the right to assemble and petition are frequently taken for granted. Cognitive liberation, on the other hand, is vital for the formation and continuance of social movements, and it may be the

[6] Cognitive liberation does not include the full spectrum of possible subjective analytic components. It does not include the meaning-making work of movements (which often shapes the *form* that cognitive liberation takes (see conclusion of this paper). But as I hope to show, the ability of movements to shape meaning may depend upon the presence of cognitive liberation in the general public. Thus, cognitive liberation is a key variable in its own right and may be seen as foundational in the subjective aspects of movements.

most critical variable under certain conditions, where repressive regimes or culturally closed opportunity structures limit the conception of the possible *a priori*.

Although the inclusion of cognitive liberation in political process theory was prescient of future subjectivist interpretations, such as framing, narrative and collective identity, it remained the least explored aspect of the theory, even in McAdam's own work. In his application of the political process model, McAdam suggests that cognitive liberation comes first from the subjective interpretation of political opportunities or macro-level events. For instance, McAdam claims, the *Brown v. the Topeka Board of Education* Supreme Court case may have inspired cognitive liberation through its symbolic value to blacks in the United States. It was a "cognitive cue" of the opening political structure.

Undoubtedly, the macro-symbolic dimension described by McAdam is an important component in the creation of cognitive liberation, but I argue it is not the only one. I posit that *grounded knowledge*, or daily lived experience, operates simultaneously with large-scale symbolic events to form cognitive liberation. Scholars are increasing their attention to the importance of lived experience in shaping knowledge. In psychology, theorists of grounded cognition are finding evidence that the very process of thinking depends upon embodied knowledge gained from actual or simulated experience (Barsalou 2008). Existential phenomenologists have also emphasized the importance of "being." From this perspective, anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) has advocated for the importance of contextual knowledge to impart an appreciation for the importance of everyday existence. To this end, while the *Brown* decision may have had symbolic value to blacks, the symbolic knowledge had to compete with the grounded knowledge of continued segregation in many areas. The importance of grounded knowledge to cognitive liberation could explain studies showing less Civil Rights movement

activity in more repressive locations, such as Mississippi (Morris 1981, McAdam 1988, Andrews and Biggs 2006, Harris 2006).

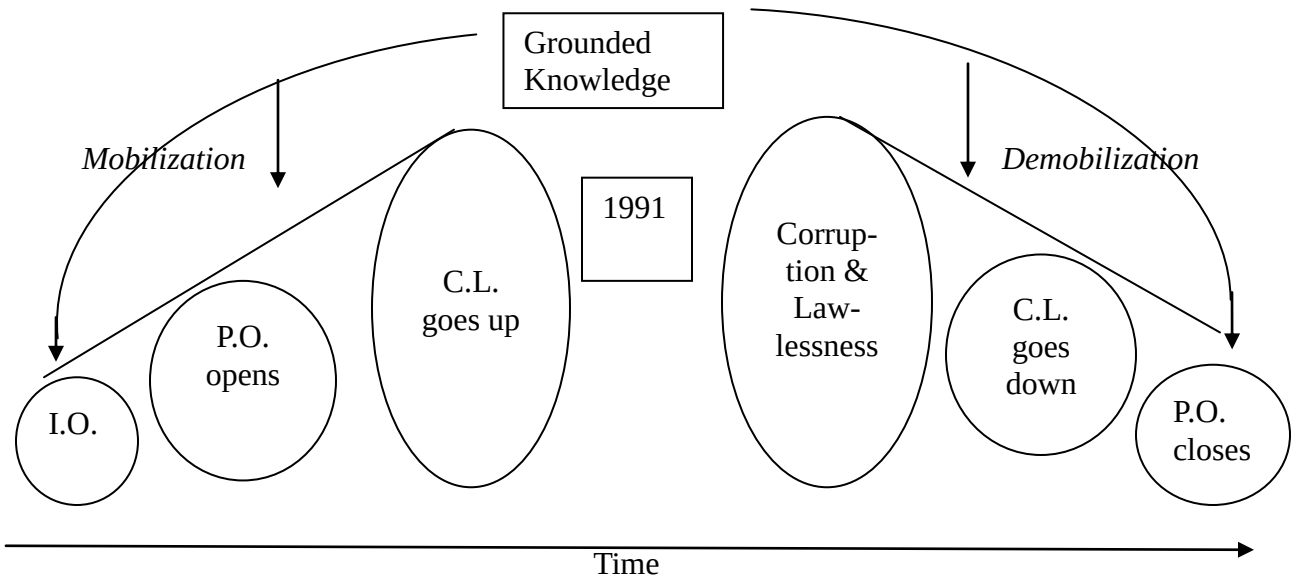
I also suggest that social trust is necessary for cognitive liberation. Faith in the efficacy of collective action implies an empowered and cooperating group, or at least the reasonable hope that such a group might be built. This idea is implicit in McAdam's theory, as he writes that "the process of cognitive liberation is held to be both more likely and of far greater consequence under conditions of strong rather than weak social integration" (McAdam 1982: 50). He uses the importance of strong integration to underscore the role of networks and organizations in the construction of cognitive liberation. But this is not simply a matter of organization – prior to the organization comes social trust. There must be an implicit trust amongst a segment of the population to make faith in the movement possible. Social doubt and skepticism of strangers' motives would hinder the creation of a mass movement. Trust often exists between a small circle of family and friends, but a mass movement requires mass trust. Faith in the collective comes before faith in collective action.

Finally, I argue that cognitive liberation can increase and decrease in conjunction with changes in the broader social context. Moreover, the state of cognitive liberation can impact the development of structural conditions over time. A public with a strong sense of its own efficacy may succeed in forcing open more structural opportunities, for instance through new legislation. Similarly, a public that has lost its sense of cognitive liberation may allow elites to close opportunities that had previously been opened.

In the case of Russian environmentalism, I suggest that it is the loss of cognitive liberation that results in the decline of the movement. In this paper, I use a modified political process theory, which allows for interaction between the structural and the subjective over time,

to explain the wax and wane of the environmental movement in Russia from the 1960s to the present. As shown in Figure 1, the environmental movement in Russia may be viewed as a spiral, wherein political opportunities, indigenous organization and cognitive liberation act upon one another over time. However, the broader social context surrounds the movement and interacts independently with each of the primary variables. Cognitive liberation is not just the subjective interpretation of opportunities, as McAdam suggests, because it also interacts with the overarching social context by means of grounded knowledge.

Figure 1: A Political Process Model of Environmental Movement Growth and Decline in Russia



I.O. – Indigenous Organization
P.O. – Political Opportunity Structure
C.L. – Cognitive Liberation

In Russia, the end of the Soviet Union resulted in economic collapse, political uncertainty and widespread and pervasive corruption. Grounded knowledge of corruption and lawlessness, I argue, undermined the public trust that is necessary for cognitive liberation. In turn, cognitive liberation (or the lack thereof) began to act upon indigenous organizations and political opportunities, rendering the position of Russian social movements even more tenuous – a problem that persists in Russian social movements to this day.

Data and Methods

My primary data consist of 25 semi-structured interviews with 18 informants gathered in Samara, Russia in the summer of 2008. Russia's sixth largest city, Samara has a population of approximately 1.5 million and lies on the Volga River in southern European Russia. It is an industrial city with automotive factories, as well as an oil and gas industry. It had an active chapter of the environmental student movement in the Soviet days, but it is not known as an environmental hotbed, as Chelyabinsk, Kirishi or Irkutsk might be. Therefore, Samara may be considered indicative of the average, provincial Russian city in terms of environmental activity.

My initial contacts were made through Greenpeace and from these I applied snowball sampling, making use of the network of environmental activists in Samara to find more informants. Ten of my informants were active environmentalists. I also conducted both semi-formal and informal interviews with members of the lay public, who were uninvolved in environmental activism, government bureaucrats, journalists, an employee with the state-owned oil company and a Russian Orthodox monk. All semi-formal interviews were recorded and

transcribed by a native Russian speaker to ensure accuracy in transcription. All informant names have been changed.

While my data come from a single-sited study, many of the trends I found were identical to previous qualitative studies of the Russian environmental movement from a variety of settings across the country (Yanitsky 2002, 2000, 1999, 1993; Henry 2002, 2006, Pickvance 1997, Crotty 2003, 2004). Environmentalists tend to come from the intelligentsia; many work as professors, journalists and artists. Those among the older generation of activists have been lifelong members of the movement, dating back to the Soviet era. Their actions include: pollution-monitoring activities, educational programs at schools and summer camps, and occasionally they organize and participate in public demonstrations or protests.

The main protest activity that I observed in the summer of 2008 was a campaign to save Voronezhkie Ozera park and two other local green spaces from development. The park is one of the few remaining green spaces in the rapidly developing city. It is officially dubbed a Natural Monument of Local Significance [*Pamyatnik Prirodi Mestnogo Znacheniya*]; it contains three lakes and a grove of oak trees estimated to be approximately 200-300 years old. That the city was giving it to developers was determined by the environmental activists to be completely illegal. In addition to rallies, activists were attempting to sue in court to protect the park.

In addition to my semi-structured and recorded interviews, I gathered ethnographic data in a variety of settings and kept detailed field notes of these conversations. I was a nonparticipant observer at three protest rallies held during the summer to protect local parks and green spaces from commercial development, including Voronezhkie Ozera. Historical data come from an analysis of previous scholarship on environmentalism in Russia conducted by historians, geographers and other social scientists.

Environmentalism in Soviet Russia

Konstantin:[7] *Almost simultaneously with perestroika, actually before perestroika, in the Soviet Union, in Russia and the republics, there occurred a green revolution. A socio-ecological revolution. Environmental rallies preceded democratic ones. First there was environmentalism, and after that came all the others: pro-democracy and other liberation movements…But first there was environmentalism.*

Environmental perspectives had existed in Russia even prior to the 1917 revolution (Weiner 1988). Historian Douglas Weiner does a masterful job in his two books on the subject tracing the environmental movement from its pre-communist form through the Gorbachev years. Although environmental activists, who operated within an official society in the Soviet apparatus, did not escape the repressive reach of Stalin, they did manage to maintain their activities, largely under the radar of the Party leaders, precisely because they were not viewed as politically threatening. Environmental activists could even frame themselves as being patriotic and good communists by emphasizing the greater good that might be garnered through nature protection (Weiner 1999). The movement at this time was small, and could be described as existing in abeyance (Taylor 1989), but it maintained its presence at a time when other forms of opposition were quelled by a totalitarian state. Environmental activists ensconced themselves in the halls of the academy: the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP), the Moscow Society of Naturalists (MOIP), the All-Union Botanical Society, the student-led nature protection brigade (*druzhiny*). Their actions included the constant protection of the system of nature preserves (*zapovedniki)*, the prevention of poaching, and an unsuccessful attempt to prevent industrial development on the pristine Lake Baikal (Weiner 1999). From its position within the Soviet apparatus, and framing its work constantly for the good of the Soviet system, environmentalism found a safe place to grow and thrive in an otherwise repressive regime.

[7] All informant names have been changed.

After a slow but steady rise in the post-Stalin years, environmentalism began to crescendo with the onset of *perestroika* and the liberalizing of the Soviet state (Yanitsky 1993). The major impetus for the change to a mass mobilization was an alteration in the political opportunity structure and a subsequent increase in cognitive liberation. In the 1980s a large number of problems that had been simmering in the Soviet political economy came suddenly to the fore. Gorbachev chose to address these problems through a program of liberalizing reforms known as *perestroika.* One aspect of *perestroika* that Gorbachev began discussing in his earliest days as General Secretary was *glasnost,* meaning openness or frankness. Through *glasnost*, the Soviet state began to openly acknowledge many of the problems that were previously covered up or censored. Corrupt or incompetent officials were exposed and dismissed; dissidents and political prisoners were freed; journalists were allowed some freedom from the censors (Hosking 2001, see also Yurchak 2006).

Conditions were favorable to the development of cognitive liberation. Not only were problems being admitted openly and in public, but critics faced no repressive reprisals. Instead, there was clear evidence of the possibility of change: Soviet troops were pulled out of Afghanistan, the anti-nuclear ballistic missile treaty was signed, and reforms were being put in place for free elections (Hosking 2001).

That cognitive liberation turned toward environmental issues stems from a variety of causes, but no doubt the chief among them was the explosion at Chernobyl in 1986. Although 18 days elapsed between the explosion and public acknowledgement of the disaster by the Soviet state, and despite the fact that the extent of the disaster was underestimated by the state (Petryna 2002), environmental catastrophe remained on everyone's lips. Additional disclosures of industrial pollution and its effects on public health made environmental protection a top priority

among the public at large. Among the most pressing was the radioactive waste released from the Mayak facility near Chelyabinsk (Dalton, Garb, Lovrich, Pierce and Whiteley 1999) and the disease-causing effluvium from a factory in Kirishi (Weiner 1999). But the movement was not limited to cities with biohazards; it sprang up in multiple forms throughout Russia and the Soviet Republics as the public increasingly put their collective finger on the problem and held the courage to point their other finger at the Soviet state.

By the late 1980s, environmentalism reached its peak and became a mass movement (Pryde 1991). As a report presented to the U.S. Congress shows:

> The Soviet people, including President Mikhail Gorbachev, now identify the environment as one of their society's most pressing problems. In a speech devoted exclusively to environmental issues in January 1990, Gorbachev called for the "ecologization" of the Soviet Union's domestic and foreign policies. This process is indeed occurring throughout Soviet society, from the corridors of the Foreign Ministry in Moscow to the streets of Vladivostok. (Green 1990: x)

Hundreds of local groups founded newly-approved "informal" organizations in cities across Russia for the protection of nature (Yanitsky 2002).[8] Environmental public meetings would attract tens of thousands (Green 1990). In 1989, the Socio-Ecological Union mobilized the first Soviet nationwide protest that successfully prevented the planned construction of a canal (Weiner 1999). During this time, environmental protest successfully closed or prevented the construction of more than fifty nuclear reactors, as well as a number of hydroelectric stations and gas pipelines (Henry 2006). When the Soviet Union held its first open elections, environmentalists

[8] The true size and scope of the movement during *perestroika* is difficult to gauge quantitatively. Most estimates range from 300 to 400 organizations across the federation. As Joan DeBardeleben writes just prior to the collapse: "The leading specialist for social relations at Goskompriroda has estimated that in the spring of 1990 over 300 environmental groups existed throughout the USSR. There are probably actually more. Most are organized on the local level, often focusing on particular environmental 'hot spots.' They generally have a core of two to five activists and a broader membership circle of twenty to thirty activists. They can often rally several hundred citizens in support of particular initiatives (rallies, demonstrations, petitions). Because new groups are constantly forming and disappearing it is difficult to maintain an accurate overview of their size and numbers" (DeBardeleben 1992: 73). While these numbers may seem small by Western standards, given the dominance of large, professional SMOs in Europe and the U.S., this was an unprecedented blossoming of independent and informal activity in the totalitarian Soviet state.

put forth candidates and won offices. These environmental politicians played important roles in the 1991 transition (Pickvance 1997, Rihoux and Rudig 2006).

The strength of the environmental movement was not based solely upon concern for nature. In part, the movement benefited from its established indigenous organizations in a society that repressed public dissent. Because environmentalists had managed to survive throughout the Soviet years, and because the movement was considered less threatening than overtly political dissidence, other movements could piggy-back on the environmentalist cause to enhance their own agendas. Because the movement was "safe," it was used by others for different ends.

Nationalism was arguably the most important of these subterranean movements, bearing the standard of environmental activism (Dawson, 1996, Pryde 1991, Weiner 1999). Many of the break-away Soviet Republics were as concerned with the Russian influence meddling in their native homeland as they were with the rivers and forests themselves. Jane Dawson's (1996) extensive research in Ukraine, Lithuania and nationalist enclaves within Russia supports claims for "eco-nationalism," by which environmentalism was merely a safe avenue for dissent against the Soviet government.

However, not all environmental protest can be dismissed as nationalism in green camouflage. The indigenous organization that the movement built had been carefully crafted and maintained throughout the years by activists who did view themselves as environmentalists first and foremost. Evidence for the green streak running through Soviet history can be found in the movement to prevent industrial development on Lake Baikal in the late 1950s and the 1960s, which clearly represented an affront to an extant environmental ethic among the Russian intelligentsia. Especially indicative of a homegrown environmentalism in Russia was the

druzhiny student movement that began in the 1960s. To this day, many of the most committed Russian environmentalists first earned their activist stripes fighting poachers as biology students and members of the *druzhiny*. Moreover, environmental concern remained high into the early 1990s, even after the "success" of the democratic and nationalist transformation (Whitefield 2003). Nationalism and Soviet dissent were undoubtedly of fundamental importance in the blossoming of environmentalism in the 1980s, particularly outside of Russia itself; but to dismiss the movement as purely nationalistic would miss the legitimacy of the claims environmentalists can make on those who love their "motherland" (Schwartz 2006).

Building upon environmentalists' indigenous organizations, and coupled with the political opportunities presented through *glasnost* and *perestroika*, Russians developed the cognitive liberation necessary for a mass environmental movement.[9] Every successful mobilization to close a nuclear plant, to prevent a pipeline, to prevent poaching, or to save historic architecture schooled the newly-active citizenry in the possibility of protest; they could trust that their actions would have lasting effect and, more importantly, they could trust each other. By the late 1980s, environmentalists finally had the nation's attention on their most beloved concern. The second part of this story is the subsequent movement decline.

Russian Environmentalism after 1991

After years of economic volatility, political instability and mounting protest from environmentalists and nationalists, the Soviet Union came to an abrupt end in August 1991 when hardliners in the party leadership attempted a coup. Declaring a state of emergency to restore order, they called the Soviet troops and prepared to assault the White House, the center of the

[9] Granted, belief in collective efficacy was never particularly high in the Soviet Union by Western standards. However, a sufficient portion of the population was inspired enough to enact the mobilizations that existed in the late perestroika period.

new, democratically-elected Russian government. People poured into the streets to protect the government and President Yeltsin climbed atop one of the tanks to declare the coup illegitimate. The military, sensing the contradiction of attacking Russia's democratically-elected government and realizing the possibility of high bloodshed, refused to fire. Yeltsin suspended the Communist Party pending investigations, Ukraine declared itself independent, other republics followed suit, and the Soviet Union was finally officially disbanded.

Although environmentalism played a critical role in the downfall of the Soviet Union by promoting popular protest, the 1991 transition was followed by a precipitous drop in environmental activity and support for environmentalism. According to one study, willingness to pay for environmental protection fell 20 percent, from 58.5 to 38.3 between 1993 and 2001, and willingness to trade environmental protection for employment opportunities tripled (Whitefield 2003). At the same time, while pollution generally decreased along with industrial collapse, per capita pollution increased (Oldfield 2005, Crotty and Crane 2004). Inefficiencies, resource-starved bureaucratic oversight, and the plundering of natural resources by private and state interests are taking their toll on Russian nature.

The 1990s were also characterized by social upheaval and chaos. Most importantly, the country suffered two major economic crises, first in 1993 and again in 1998. Industry collapsed, unemployment was widespread, and those who had work often went months without pay. The government was bankrupt; tax evasion was epidemic. Corruption and profiteering flourished in the lawless and poverty-stricken nation. Sociologist Oleg Yanitsky referred to Russia in this time-period as "the society of all-encompassing risk" (2002, 2000) in an ironic inversion of the postmaterialist "risk society" theory (Beck 1992).

Often, the reason for the decline of environmentalism in Russia is simply taken for granted. Using a logic of postmaterialist values (Inglehart 1995), it seems only natural that environmentalism would fade in the face of grievous economic conditions. As Douglas Weiner writes:

> By the early 1990s, as purely economic and political issues edged out even the urgent concerns about public health, as workers were now forced to choose between slow poisoning and unemployment, the fight against pollution did not seem nearly as clear-cut an issue as it had a mere three or four years earlier. For many, putting bread on the table is more urgent than shutting down a factory that causes asthma in a child. (Weiner 1999: 437)

Because this explanation seems so obvious, it should be emphasized that conditions like economic collapse do not inevitably smother environmental movement activity. Indeed, it is sometimes those who face dire economic conditions who are the loudest voices for environmentalism.[10]

Neither can economic collapse explain the concomitant decline of other social movements in the post-Soviet years. Although environmentalism was the strongest social movement in the late Soviet period, it was not the only progressive movement in the country, and neither has it been the only movement to suffer during the transition (Howard 2003, Evans et al 2006). It may be logical to juxtapose environmental protection and economics in a country rich with natural resources, but it is more difficult to make the case for juxtaposing economics and women's rights, human rights or pro-democracy movements. Indeed, other periods of economic crisis, the American Great Depression of the 1930s, for example, show an upsurge in movement activity rather than decline (Piven and Cloward 1977). Yet, virtually all progressive social

[10] The most notable examples include the Chipko movement in India, which was made up of primarily female rural peasants; also, Chico Mendes and the Brazilian rubber tappers were low on the economic spectrum when they began demanding change in Amazon forestry practices. Indigenous peoples in Central and South America also make strong environmental claims despite their oppressed social and economic status. See, for example, Martinez-Alier 1991.

movements in post-transition Russia have experienced decline since the early 1990s. "In post-communist Russia…, labor movements are typically weak, fragmented, and disorganized; women's movements barely discernible; and human rights movements all but dead" (Dawson 1999:13). Russian society as a whole has become increasingly unreceptive to social movements. It is not merely a problem of "willingness to pay" for environmental protection.

The state has also been a hostile force and has impeded environmental activity. In the last decade, the Putin administration actively worked against environmentalism, while returning to a Soviet practice of heavy natural resource extraction (Turnock 2001). What amounted to benign neglect by Yeltsin of the environmental bureaucracy in the 1990s became a malignant onslaught by the Putin administration (Henry and Douhovnikoff 2008). In 2000, by presidential decree, Putin abolished the State Committee for Environmental Protection as well as the State Forestry Committee, placing their duties under the auspices of the Ministry of Natural Resources. Ostensibly, this move was intended to minimize bureaucracy and the duplication of services, but it was viewed as a hostile step by most environmentalists (Massa and Tynkkynen 2001, Peterson and Bielke 2001, Henry 2002, 2006), as the Ministry of Natural Resources is primarily focused on resource extraction, not environmental protection. The move has been roundly accused as an attempt by the state to rapidly exploit the nation's natural resources without interference by environmental concerns in order to rebuild Russia's economy (Henry and Douhovnikoff 2008).

The state has also shown a willingness to prosecute those who speak out against environmental misconduct, as the trials of Alexander Nikitin and Grigory Pasko, two environmental whistleblowers, clearly show. Both Nikitin and Pasko had spoken to foreign media about nuclear waste dumping, and both were charged with treason (Henry 2008, 2002).

On a local level, environmental groups have reported harassment by the state through police break up of demonstrations and bureaucrats intentionally causing difficulties with tax inspection and registration filing (Henry 2008). Signatures on petitions or referenda are disqualified by the Central Election Commission (Henry 2002). Undoubtedly, environmental activists attempting to work in Russia today face a severely constricted opportunity structure.

But the decline of the environmental movement cannot solely be explained by political opportunities and repression. The political opportunity structure remained relatively open in the early 1990s, during the same period while environmentalism was losing ground. While the potential for movement activity is decidedly weaker now due to the aggressive actions of the state, the decline in social movement activity preceded the restrictions made by the Putin administration.[11]

Instead, drawing upon qualitative data on the present state of environmental activity, I will show that the corruption that erupted in the early years of "wild capitalism" and the free-for-all market of an economic collapse was a major contributor to the decline of social movement activity by eroding the social trust necessary for cognitive liberation. Once cognitive liberation declined, movements no longer had the capacity to prevent elites from closing political opportunities, resulting in the heavy repression described above.

[11] Two major public opinion pollsters in Russia (the Foundation for Public Opinion and the Russian Public Opinion Research Center) show that belief in protest has been consistently low since 1997. I could not find data on the "protest mood" of the Russian populace during the late Soviet period or the early 1990s. However, if protest is considered "democracy in action," then the mood has fallen drastically since 1991. According to the Pew Research Center: "In 1991, by a 51%-39% margin, Russians believed their country should rely on a democratic government rather than a strong leader to solve the country's problems. By 2002, the share choosing democratic government had fallen to 21%. Although it has since risen slightly, confidence remains low, with only 28% of Russians in our 2005 survey saying the country's problems can best be solved by democracy" (http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=250).

Corruption and Lawlessness

Soviet citizens were no strangers to corruption, but the form that corruption took in the state-planned economy was a very different animal than what occurred in the transition years.[12] Much of what might be called corruption in the Soviet Union revolved around *blat,* or the unofficial system of exchange that was based upon traded favors amongst members of informal social networks (Ledeneva 1998). Simply put, *blat,* along with the underground economy, was a mechanism for coping with the chronic shortages and uneven quality of goods that were available in the state-planned system. But there were a number of characteristics to this Soviet tit-for-tat that set it apart from the unprecedented corruption of the transition. First, bribes, black markets and *blat* were a matter to day-to-day survival for most Soviet citizens; no one was out to get rich via *blat.* Also, *blat* was exchange based upon barter, not upon money; to that end, it represented real, immediate, physical needs, rather than abstract cash value (Ledeneva 2000). Finally, and most importantly for my argument, because it involved reciprocal favors, *blat depended upon social trust.* As Alena Ledeneva writes: "*Blat* is about using informal contacts based upon mutual sympathy and trust…*Blat* was thus not a relationship for the sake of exchange, but an exchange for the sake of a relationship" (Ledeneva 2000: 184). Corruption was widespread in the Soviet Union, but its form precluded the possibility of major damage to cognitive liberation because its very existence required social trust. The same case cannot be made for the more virulent version of corruption that replaced *blat* in the post-Soviet economy.

With the collapse of the Soviet system, corruption exploded into a new form and on a scale that was truly unprecedented in the Russian experience. While party members and state officials seized up newly-privatized assets, gangs began a reign of terror through street warfare, contract killings and an ever-expanding protection racket (Vareso 2001). Many unsuspecting

[12] Although Kneen (2000) argues that an underlying logic connects the two.

Russians in the early 1990s lost all their money to confidence men through pyramid schemes and investment scams that accompanied the chaos of privatization (Shevchenko 2002). And privatization itself had many elements of a con game with government "loans for shares" auctions, by which private interests received valuable public assets below market price in exchange for funding Yeltsin's re-election (Volkov 2008). In such a context, despite the money given to the mafia for "protection," real self-protection took the form of a calculated social distrust.

Another fundamental difference that emerged between the old corruption and the new was the reintroduction of social class into Russia. While there were always party elites who took more than their fair share, the vast majority of Soviet citizens lived at about the same level of material and economic wellbeing, or deprivation, as the case may be. Party members had access to higher quality goods and services, but the difference in quality was not profound. Moreover, the "corrupt" practice of *blat* allowed party members to share their relative privilege with their friends and acquaintances. Whereas *blat* had actually eased some of the social differentiation that party membership created through informal exchange, corruption today is self-serving at the expense of others. Russians witness the rewards for self-serving corruption in the mass accumulation of wealth among the Russian oligarchs. The *nouveau-riche* represent a class stratification that was unimaginable in Soviet times. According to Forbes list of the richest people in 2008, there are 87 Russian billionaires with a net worth of $471.4 billion.[13] Meanwhile, 20 percent of Russians live below the national poverty line, according to the World Bank.[14] That much of this wealth was created by means of the predatory and aggressive tactics described above indicates the change in scale of corruption in post-Soviet Russia. Corruption is

[13] http://www.forbes.com/lists/2008/10/billionaires08_The-Worlds-Billionaires_CountryOfCitizen.html
[14] http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/rus_aag.pdf

no longer about barter for the sake of mere survival: it is now a money economy geared toward personal gain, purchasable power and the vast accumulation of wealth by the few.

My interviews and ethnographic data support the notion of widespread and pervasive corruption in Russia, and they show how it operates against the local environmental movement and social movements more generally. The qualitative data that I provide below are not direct evidence for corruption; they are evidence of *perceptions* of corruption. However, corruption is difficult to measure directly. Self-reports of corruption are subject to response bias. For this reason, perceived corruption is frequently used as a proxy measure for corruption (Mishler and Rose 2008). Perceived corruption is valid in part because people act based upon their perceptions (Mishler and Rose 2008). Insofar as cognitive liberation is a subjective and interpretive process for determining potential efficacy, a perceived sense of widespread corruption would be equivalent to widespread corruption itself. But grounded knowledge of actual corrupt dealings is also an important part of the interpretive process. When I asked one of my informants, Alla, how she knows that there is corruption, she blushed and said, "We know because we pay."

Corruption and lawlessness are discussed by Russians on a day to day basis as a fact of life. All of my informants spoke of corruption in the local government, and environmentalists were not alone in their assessment of this problem. These topics arose regularly in my informal conversations with people on the street or at social gatherings. Once, a woman who worked for the police asked me casually whether police in America take bribes. I replied that there were certainly some cases when a police officer was found to be in the pay of a drug lord or mafia boss, but that generally, no. "For instance, if I were caught speeding, I couldn't pay a bribe to the cop," I explained. "We do," she answered flatly, giving a half-shrug.

Corruption undermines the rule of law and fosters casual anarchy whereby any law or ordinance can be overcome with the right type of bribe. The result is skepticism about the rule of law itself. As one lawyer explained to me, "In Russia, laws are artificial documents. They are written just so, so that you can still get whatever you want." There is a sense that everything is possible, but also nothing can be depended upon. Once, on my way to meet an informant, I hailed a gypsy cab [*chastnik*]. The driver was a small, middle-aged man in a Russian-made car. The seatbelt did not fasten, but rather was tied in a knot to stay in place. The driver could tell I was foreign and I confessed to being an American. "Which is better: Russia or America?" he asked me. I gave my usual, respectful answer: that there are positives and negatives about both countries. He shook his head. "No, I mean for business, which is better? Because it seems to me that Russia is better. Here everything is possible, you know? We have a *really* free market. With money, nothing stands in your way."

Corruption is troubling for social movements because many social movements strive for political changes. Goals frequently take the form of new laws, regulations or legal protections. Corruption throws a wrench in this process. If any law can be bent or broken for the right type of bribe, then the law may as well not exist. The definition of success may then change from achieving positive legislation to keeping existing legislation from being ignored. Essentially, government corruption forces social movements into playing defense. Such was the case that was repeatedly brought to my attention regarding Voronezhskie Ozera park, a natural monument that the city had given to developers.

> Igor: Corruption in Russia is at a high level, according to *Kommersant*, a national publication. They published data that in Russia approximately 25 to 35 percent of bureaucrats take bribes, and Samara is no different….Take for example this construction. Every tiny little square in the city is being given away for construction. All of that is through bribes, through money.

According to environmentalists, the problem is not that there are no laws on the books to protect the environment – the place is a designated natural monument – but rather that the rule of law has no power compared to the rule of money.

Cognitive liberation, like transvaluation before it, represents a shift away from a fatalistic viewpoint toward one of agency and efficacy. One way that corruption damages cognitive liberation is by reintroducing fatalism among the general public. Once it appears established that money is the ultimate power, people take that power for granted. Even committed and active environmentalists were seldom optimistic that their efforts could defeat those with greater financial resources and fewer moral scruples. In the summer of 2008, environmentalists asked a prosecutor to file a claim on the illegality of construction in the Voronezhskie Ozera natural monument. They were attempting a legal strategy; however, no one assumed a neutral position for the court in that battle. Inna, a college professor and activist, explained: "In Russia today, the court system is such that – as everyone knows – winning is not about who has the circumstantial or incorrect position, but about orders from the top. And the orders from the top are virtually all connected with money." Another informant I spoke with concurred:

> Evgenii: In general, the level of corruption is high right now. Not long ago, there was research showing that Russia is one of the world leaders. Obviously, if that is so, then there will be corruption in the [environmental] sphere as well. It doesn't come in last when it comes to deciding problems of breaking environmental law, breaching the norms of ecological legislation, violating all kinds of things. You can make a deal, why not? Naturally, they make deals. If there is money, it answers these questions.

When money becomes the means through which the game is played, those without powerful resources consider themselves barred from participation.

In discussing corruption, environmentalists in Samara viewed politicians and businessmen as two sides of the same opposing force, each representing the absolute power of

elites. As one environmentalist-journalist, Evgenii, said to me, "Commercial firms behave like complete fascists," and then he mocked what they might say: "You don't have any rights, you are nobody, and we will decide everything with [our] power." The drain of resources from movement organizations that accompanied the economic collapse is therefore only part of the problem. More distressing is what can be done with resources by those few who possess them and the effect this has on perceived collective efficacy. Activists and the general population cannot compete with oligarchs and business elites when the law is up for sale. Under such conditions, the public is apt to revert to a fatalism that accepts its own powerlessness as inevitable due to the relative lack of wealth in the growing class divide.

The environmental movement in Samara is decidedly without resources. Activists are seldom, if ever, paid for their work; most are volunteers. Movement leaders operate their organizations out of their work offices in the evening hours. And one activist claimed that even her work office had only one computer for five people. While scholars used to debate over whether raising funds from foreign donors served to distance activists from their constituents (Henderson 2003, Yanitsky 1999), this debate is now largely moot. According to federal law, it is very difficult for Russian nonprofits to receive foreign grants, and many of my informants claimed their organizations were feeling the loss of these funds from abroad. None reported receiving more than a few hundred to a couple thousand dollars for a computer or an education program, but simply having the option of foreign funds eliminated from their spectrum of possibility was obviously demoralizing. Money from the West may have distanced the movement from the populace, as scholars claim, but according to my informants, it was better than no money at all, which is the situation that they currently face.

However, when I discussed the lack of resources with another activist, Alla, she laughed. "There are resources. There is an Ecological Fund." She then proceeded to tell me of an organization in Samara called the Ecological Club. In addition to other activities, she said, the organization used to give out small grants to local environmental organizations and citizens' groups to sponsor their activities.

> Alla: The leadership of the club changed, everybody left, and it became [different]. It doesn't work with the locals anymore, it doesn't participate in any activities. It keeps a fund of ready money, if that. The Ecological Fund, which gets its money from the regional and federal budget, they spend [only] on *certain* projects done by *certain* people, who split [the money].

My snowball sample had not led me to the Ecological Club, so I asked Alla about it. She dismissed it, saying: "Probably it's not worth it, talking to them. They don't busy themselves with ecology now. It has become…something else."

Self-interest sets the terms for most government action in Samara; so much so that even the smallest day-to-day activities become mired in bureaucracy and money.

> Inna: If I wanted to pick up litter on my own, I couldn't do it because, first of all, there are not receptacles for individually-collected trash, and secondly, because there are laws against [collecting trash without a permit]. Not just for individuals, but also for schools. According to the law, you have to fill out a packet of official documents, and you have to pay money for that. The person who fills out the documents wants money, so I have to pay. Only the middleman can do the documents properly, I can't. But the government doesn't actually control what is going on [in the trash collection], they just need the documents, the paperwork. But the documents are difficult – the government resists simplicity because they are connected to the middlemen who give them a cut of the money…All of this, just to pick up trash.

While some environmentalists did discuss outright repression by authorities, more often than any other problem my informants bemoaned a structural system as fluid as water, where money dictates what gets done, and what remains undone, and where personal gain is the final determinant of civic action. Thus, even among activists, grounded knowledge

of corruption and the ruthlessness of the unregulated market has twisted the capitalistic logic of individualism into fatalism and, subsequently, a decline in the possibility of collective action for change.

Public Apathy and Social Withdrawal

Social movements, by definition, rely upon the public involvement by organized citizens. However, in Russia today, the public is decidedly uninvolved. Too often, Russian citizens have watched the public good turn to personal gain, so that, for self-preservation, they turn inward, looking after only their own interests. The leaders and activists who remained from the heyday of environmentalism 20 years ago often bemoaned the disillusionment and withdrawal from a public that no longer believes in the possibility of change.

> Igor: It seems to me that the problem with corruption isn't with the legislators…, but rather that our public is inert. The people are used to drinking. Vodka, song and sailboats [he quotes a Russian saying: *vodka, lodka i melodka*] – there is an example of contemporary Russia.

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> Inna: The majority of the population just works for money to buy drinks or to go on vacation. Going abroad has become very popular lately…People don't spend their time and efforts [on social problems], so in the end, only professionals know what is going on. Teachers and scientists, and there are very few of us.

But apathy is the symptom of a greater root cause: lack of faith in public institutions and lack of faith that collective action will overcome social problems. Corruption plagues public organizations, including those that might ordinarily be used to prevent corruption, for instance the law enforcement and court systems. Russians have no recourse for a nonprofit "gone bad" or an apparatchik on the take. And so the safest assumption is that everything is corrupt and no person or institution can be trusted. As Inna bemoaned to me, "There isn't faith in environmental

organizations, just as there isn't in other nonprofit organizations. People think the money they collect will be used for personal gain." And this assumption is not without merit. While the environmentalists I spoke with were committed activists, struggling on behalf of the natural world, there were several organizations wearing the Green label that were widely disparaged by my informants as self-serving: locally, the Ecological Club that Alla described above, and nationally, Green Patrol, Green Cross and the Party "Greens," formerly known as KEDR. Nikolai, an activist with advanced degrees in ecology and law, explained the "fake" environmental groups that operate in Russia this way:

> Nikolai: In principle, the International Green Cross is an organization that works on chemical safety. But the Russian Green Cross is very different from the international version. Its primary sponsor is the Ministry of Atomic Energy, with all the [expected] resulting aftereffects that I really don't need to tell you further about it…Green Patrol's legs grow out of the Kremlin. So do those of the Russian Green Party. If they are Green, then I'm a ballerina with the Bolshoi Theater. They are people who have no connection to environmentalism, who have never practiced or studied environmental protection, who don't understand anything about it, and they are paid to put on the image of the Greens. Why? So the elites will have the ability to maneuver. So that when people accuse them of not working with nonprofits, they can say, "What do you mean? We work with nonprofits – here they are! We're great friends!"

The Russian public has thus learned all too well that nonprofits, like government institutions, are not to be trusted. But this has enormous negative repercussions for serious environmentalists who are neither corrupt nor self-interested, but cannot convince the public otherwise. Inna described for me a mock conversation she might have, in a failed attempt to garner support.

> Inna: If you say, "Are you worried about environmental problems?" then about 75 percent will say, yes, we're worried.
> - Are you ready to do something about it?
> - Yes, we would like to.
> - Would you participate by giving money?
> - No, we won't.
> - Why not?
> - We don't trust you. We won't give money because we don't believe it will really go toward helping the environment.

- Will you come to a demonstration or rally?
- No, we don't believe the rally is really connected with protecting nature, but is more likely about protecting someone else's interests.
- Will you go collect litter?
- No, we won't. Because if we individually pick up litter, either way people will throw trash there later, so what's the point?

So people don't see the connection between their own actions and environmental goals or changes for the better.

Public apathy and distrust become a vicious circle in which environmentalists are trapped. The public support necessary to overcome corruption is eaten away by the distrust bred by corruption itself. And public apathy undermines individual motivations, which social movements attempt to encourage.

What is most curious about the discursive opportunity structure in Russia is that it is not anti-environmental, but rather anti-activism. According to data released by the Russian Center for Public Opinion Research in March 2008, the protest mood in Russia is currently the lowest level they have on record.[15] Only 21 percent of respondents said that protest was possible where they live, and the number falls to 15 percent in cities with less than 100,000 people. Only 18 percent of respondents said they would attend a protest to defend their rights or living standard.

In her inductive theory of social movement abeyance, Taylor (1989) describes the women's movement in the 1940s and 1950s as operating in a hostile cultural context because of the dominant gender conservatism that arose in the post-war era. Yet the Russian culture is not anti-environmental, as might be said about women's liberation in post-war America. Environmentalism does not suffer because of an anti-environmental sentiment in the Russian population per se, but instead because activism as a whole is under tremendous pressure, growing out of a social context that has lost faith in the power of the people.

[15] www.wciom.ru

Not only does this lack of faith prevent individuals from joining social movements, but it then sets the plausibility structure for society at large. Peer pressure begins to play a role against movement involvement and individual actions that favor change. Many environmentalists talked about public perception of their activism as being ludicrous.

> Igor: Let's say you and I grab bags and start to pick up the trash. People would say "They're crazy people. Why are they picking up trash for free?"...For the majority of people that would not be normal, that kind of deed. I remember once a guy was picking up trash on the beach, just out of the goodness of his heart, and people looked at him like he was crazy and said, "Why are you bothering? [*Zachem tebe eto nado?*] Have a beer, get drunk." Missionaries are not fashionable, see.

Environmentalists face an uphill battle against a public that rejects the very notion of social engagement.

The power of activism comes in the form of an organized and engaged public. In a social environment without cognitive liberation, a society that provides neither structural nor cultural support for social movements, environmentalists in Samara and elsewhere in Russia are not even successful at holding their ground. The successive moves that the government has taken against environmental movements and social movements generally, through restrictions in funding, difficulties in taxes and registration, harassment of protestors, and persecution of whistleblowers, has been possible primarily because there is no major threat from a cognitively liberated public. Apathy, distrust and disillusionment blossomed in the 1990s. By the time Putin came to power in 2000, social movement repression faced little challenge in the public at large.

Discussion

In this paper, I have used the political process model to put forth an interactive and processual explanation of movement decline in post-Soviet Russia. Although I centered my

analysis on the environmental movement due to its historical importance and previously high rates of activity, the theory can be applied to other progressive movements in Russia as well.

As summarized in Figure 2, I posit that the explosive growth of corruption during the instability and economic collapse in post-transition Russia had a deadening effect on public trust. This trust was necessary for the belief in collective efficacy, also known as *cognitive liberation*. Whereas oftentimes cognitive liberation may affect only a particular movement group, for instance, women, religious conservatives, or ethnic groups, the widespread corruption associated with Russia's transition away from communism has weakened the general cognitive liberation, hurting many movement groups, not simply environmentalism. As the Russian populace lost its cognitive liberation, the ability of social movements to make demands was greatly reduced. No longer restrained by the possibility of public revolt, elites were able to alter the rules from above to close the political opportunity structure and further social movement decline.

Figure 2: A Process Causal Model of Movement Decline

Corruption →Cognitive Liberation recedes/reinstituted fatalism →Social Movement declines → state reasserts power → Political Opportunity Structure closes → movement decline continues

While the model presented in this paper suggests that corruption has a negative effect on cognitive liberation, the form and scale of corruption makes a difference. There was corruption in the Soviet Union also, but the corruption was of a different form: it greased the wheels and was geared more toward survival en masse than extravagance for the oligarchs. As my data show, massive and virulent corruption is thought to run through all sectors of society, including

government, business and even nonprofits and social movement organizations. The assumption many Russians adopt is that everyone is out for their own gain and that no one can be trusted.

Grounded knowledge underlies the formative interaction between cognitive liberation and social movement mobilization and decline. If experience fosters the expectation of functional institutions, then the uncovering of a single instance of corruption may spark cognitive liberation on behalf of reform or change. When lived experience indicates widespread corruption, the uncovering of yet another abuse of power will have little or no mobilizing effect.

Finally, this model calls into question the assumption that Russia's problems are merely a continuation of the Soviet experience. There is a stream of scholarship that suggests that former citizens of the Soviet Union are more inert by virtue of their "Soviet legacy" (Howard 2003, Dawson 1999). Because "civic participation" was forced in the Soviet Union, the theory goes, now that people are "free" they refuse to volunteer their participation. This theory of civil society, most explicitly put forward by Marc Howard (2003) but echoed frequently, belies the brief period where "informal" voluntary organizations flourished in the later years of the Soviet period, as well as the passionate commitment of the activists described by Douglas Weiner. Moreover, it denies the very real changes that have taken place in Russia over the last 20 years.

This is not to say, however, that the Soviet legacy plays no role. It is highly likely that cognitive liberation may have been easier to quell in Russia precisely because of the Soviet history of repression. Past knowledge of the Soviet experience would be a central component when interpreting grounded knowledge in the present, and Soviet legacy should remain an important factor in a full analysis of contemporary events in Russia. However, it should not be the immediate fall-back position for our theoretical work lest we miss the subtle distinctions of post-transition social developments. Nearly two decades have passed since the Soviet Union was

disbanded; an entire generation has come of age without any first-hand knowledge of the Soviet system. Despite the historical amnesia that permeates a great deal of sociological study, in the case of Russia, the fixation on the Soviet legacy may blind us to critical – and very new – social forces.

Conclusion

In this article, I have built upon McAdam's political process model by extending the concept of cognitive liberation. I put forward that cognitive liberation is composed via "grounded knowledge," or the importance of daily life experiences in the subjective assessment of collective efficacy. I also suggest that social trust is a necessary precursor to cognitive liberation. I have applied the model as an explanation of social movement decline, showing that damage to cognitive liberation from grounded knowledge of corruption can form a negative feedback spiral, and in turn affect the ability of elites to close previously open political opportunities. I have illustrated this negative spiral through a study of the decline of Russian environmentalism in the post-Soviet years, although the model could be expanded to other progressive movements in Russia that have also experienced decline.

The model of decline that I presented at the beginning of this article, whereby cognitive liberation and political opportunities form a negative feedback spiral, may not provide much optimism for those hoping for improved environmental conditions in Russia through collective action. But embedded in a feedback system is the potential to start a new cycle based upon new feedback. What Russians sorely need is concrete evidence in their daily lives of improved conditions through personal action. Framing the problem is simply insufficient if the public

dismisses the very notion of popular engagement. At least one of my informants understood this clearly. Leaving a rally to save Voronezhsie Ozera, we had the following conversation:

> Nikolai: I have a challenge: to create a culture…where people fight for their interests, where they take responsibility for their lives….
>
> Kate: And how do you think is best…[to do this]?
>
> Nikolai: Only by what we just did [at the rally]. Words are useless. Words can never teach people such things. But then the problem is this: *you have to win*. Because if you have a mass movement like this and people lose, then it is even worse, because then people will just be disappointed in everything. The trick is to win. Maybe not 100 percent, but at least halfway. Then people will see that they *can* win, they *can* fight for their rights.[16]

It may have to start small, but there is hope for the environmental movement and other progressive movements for change if the feedback system among the general population gets an influx of concrete, positive and *directly experienced* results. Were this to occur, it is likely that the new, positive feedback of small successes could rebuild cognitive liberation, not only for environmentalism, but other Russian movements that are currently in abeyance.

This research points to several new directions for social movement scholarship. Most importantly, how does the experience of corruption and cognitive liberation differ in other post-Soviet contexts? One would imagine that the environmental movements in Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Estonia would have different stories to tell. A cross-national comparison between Russia and other Soviet breakaway republics could yield interesting answers to questions of corruption, cognitive liberation and social movement decline.

Another avenue for research would be an investigation of the always-important negative finding. My model posits that lack of social trust has a negative effect on cognitive liberation and that widespread corruption and lawlessness in post-Soviet Russia has resulted in a social

[16] An informant has recently reported that the effort in Samara to save the oak trees was, in fact, successful.

movement "dead zone." Yet, there is a notable exception to this phenomenon and that is the rise of the neo-Nazi movement in Russia. Nationalists and skinheads spread rapidly after the transition. Future research could explore whether social trust is a necessary component for neo-Nazi movements, or if the assumptions of the movement actually inspire collective efficacy in environments with low levels of social trust.

An interesting point of departure for future research may also be found in the connection between cognitive liberation and democracy. In her comparison of environmental movements in Russia and Hungary, Katy Pickvance (1997) finds that civil society appears to be fostered by democratic institutions. This research supports her finding insofar as dysfunctional democratic states seem to reduce cognitive liberation, which is necessary for movements, and also probably for civil society. Does democracy inspire cognitive liberation? If so, does it shape the form that cognitive liberation takes? In other words, what determines by what means we find ourselves to be potentially efficacious? Piven and Cloward once urged against organization-building in social movements (1995), yet this seems to be the dominant trend in Western movement activity: how much of this is due to the shape of cognitive liberation, to the "where, when and how" that we are encouraged to feel efficacious?

Finally, I hope this study has renewed interest in the role of cognitive liberation in social movements more generally, but especially in social movement decline. Too often we emphasize movement strategies, tactics and frames as though they operate upon a passive and neutral public. This case study of Russia should make clear that belief in personal or collective efficacy cannot be assumed in the general population. Corruption is not the only factor that diminishes cognitive liberation. If we turn our sociological gaze back upon perceived potential efficacy, we

may start to see movements differently in Western nations – not just where we find them, but also where and why we do not.

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Appendix: List of Sources

Semi-structured Interviews

Nikolai: Professor of Ecology, chairman of environmental organization, degree in law, activist

Inna: Professor of Sociology, environmental activist

Igor: Journalist, environmental activist

Evgenyi: Editor of online media outlet, environmental activist

Sveta: university student, environmental activist

Alla: head of municipal environmental program, environmental activist

Boris: founder and director of environmental protection and education organization, activist

Elena: City employee in environmental quality and monitoring

Konstantin: Professor of Biology, head of environmental organization, activist

Maia: Environmental activist and leader the campaign to save Voronezhskie Ozera

Marina: Mother of Maia, activist

Varvara: Federal employee in water protection for the Samara region

Lara: Employee of state-owned oil company in environmental safety

Zinaida: Pensioner, former *kolkhoz* worker, unaffiliated with environmentalism

Veronika: Police employee, unaffiliated with environmentalism

Pyotr: Businessman, unaffiliated with environmentalism

Katya: School teacher, unaffiliated with environmentalism

Natasha: Journalist, peripherally involved in environmental activities

Informal Interviews and Other Informants

Two men at the riverfront park (naberezhnaya)
Retired man with his infant granddaughter at Voronezhskie Ozera

Retired man at Voronezhskie Ozera
Married couple repairing their garage near Voronezhskie Ozera
Young woman with daughter at Voronezhskie Ozera
Married professors strolling with son at the youth park
Woman at downtown city park
Three police women and one's boyfriend at the beach
Russian Orthodox monk at the local seminary
Lawyer in the street
Married couple at music festival
Young man at music festival
Middle-aged man at music festival
Two teenaged girls at music festival
Former kolkhoz worker at museum
History professor at university
Five people at a dacha
Six attendees at one protest event
Four attendees at second protest event
A group of English language students at the university

Other Primary Data
Fifty-three pages of field notes

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