

## **Cultural Structures and Tactical Repertoires: The Animal Rights Movements in France and the United States**

**Elizabeth Cherry, May 2008**

The animal rights movements in France and the United States share a common historical trajectory, moving from animal protection, to early vegetarian societies, to first wave animal rights activism. However, despite similarities in goals, strategies, and tactics, the contemporary animal rights movement that focuses on factory farming and veganism is much weaker in France than in the United States. Why is this French movement less successful than the U.S. movement? More broadly, why do movements with similar goals, strategies, and tactics experience differential outcomes? I answer this question with an analysis of ethnographic data from the movements in both countries. I conducted interviews with 35 U.S. activists from 10 different organizations, and 37 French activists from 13 organizations. I also conducted participant observation with U.S. groups over a period of two years, and spent 10 months with organizations in France.

I first examine the similarities between the two movements. Activists in both countries faced myriad challenges from the culture in which they worked. These challenges, as well as activists' responses to them, were similar in both countries. I argue these similarities are not happenstance, but that they favor each other because they stemmed from one particular cultural structure—symbolic boundaries. I then examine the shared strategies that French and U.S. activists use to combat those boundaries. Activists engaged in four strategies of symbolic boundary deconstruction: focusing, transgression, victimization-association, and contention-association.

But the similarities between the movements end there. Just as extant culture may provide roadblocks to activists, it also provides building blocks for their arguments. I thus analyze the cultural resources activists use in their arguments, and examine how and why such resources resonated differently in the extant culture of the two countries. Activists in the United States could promote animal rights and vegetarianism by using health, religion, food, and the media, but these arguments did not resonate in France. U.S. animal rights opponents, however, could charge activists with a threat of terrorism, a resource that actually benefited the French movement.

Having seen which paths may be more or less fruitful to take, I then examine how activists actually choose the paths they do—how they choose their strategies and tactics. I compare a micro-level organizational analysis of what activists said in interviews about their strategic and tactical decisions with a meso-level organizational analysis of how activists in social movement organizations actually made those choices in the field. I argue that strategic and tactical decisions are best explained by looking to the cultural logic of the social movement itself. The U.S. movement favored a logic of pragmatism and practicality, whereas the French movement worked with a logic of coherence of thought and action. Thus U.S. activists chose strategies or tactics that offer the best chance of meeting their end goal, and French activists chose strategies or tactics that best reflected their philosophical outlook on animal rights.