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Community and Life-Chances: Risk Movements in the United States and Germany

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ABSTRACT: The connotations attached to the concept of 'risk' have changed over the last several decades. In particular, the image of risk, at least in the world's most economically advanced countries, has turned from predominantly positive to highly critical. A sociological look at this historic change reveals the emergence of a plurality of risk definitions that can be attributed to different risk cultures. We can distinguish risk cultures by their proximity to the dominant social practice of risk taking; namely risk cultures belong either to the centre or the periphery of society. Social movements that resist risky technologies are examples of a peripheral risk culture. Due to a certain concept of social community their perception of risk differs fundamentally from that of the centre. In addition, cultural variation across countries leads to different representations of risk-avoidance in social movements. This contribution illustrates these differences by comparing the American and German anti-nuclear movements.

KEYWORDS: Community, life-chances, risk movements, risk cultures

THE CONCEPT OF 'RISK MOVEMENTS'

Prior to the industrial accidents at Seveso and Three Mile Island the notion of 'risk' clearly still had attached to it positive connotations in the public mind. 'Wer nicht wagt, der nicht gewinnt' ('Nothing ventured, nothing gained') as the German proverb says. No progress without some risk, no benefits without leaping into the unknown. Across a broad stretch of society, people typically viewed technological risks as *grosso modo* contained and controlled, sometimes as overwhelmingly advantageous.[1]

Since the 1970s, society has increasingly come to view risk as associated with danger and 'angst' as much as with benefits. Whole scientific industries specialising in 'risk assessment' (Lowrance 1976; Starr 1969), 'risk perception'

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(Kahnemann, Slovic and Tversky 1982; Jungermann and Slovic 1993), and 'risk communication' (Covello, McCallum and Pavlova 1991; Jungermann, Rohrmann and Wiedemann 1991), have emerged to study the loss of confidence. Obviously, the idea of technological progress – so very central to Enlightenment commitments to continual human enhancement – has suffered erosion in the wake of several catastrophic technological accidents that have caused severe environmental damage. The concept of progress, as it developed during the seventeenth century, was based on trust in human reason to improve constantly the state of human affairs in the future. Accordingly, progress was indicative of the possibility of human perfection (Koselleck 1975). In terms of modern decision theory, progress means the belief in the human capacity to guarantee positive outcomes of decisions. During the Enlightenment, progress was delimited by its ultimate purpose, specifically to further 'public benefits' (i.e., the common good), even when it appeared to stimulate exclusively 'private vices'. The enlightened thinkers were convinced that individual freedom, especially economic freedom, opened up opportunities for improving humanity's fate. Their expectation was that freedom, in tandem with an increasing body of scientific knowledge, could provide the necessary insights about future developments that would finally render superfluous past dependence on religiously-founded foresight (Nisbet 1980: 179-186).

Since the nineteenth century, however, society has come to view progress much more ambivalently. This characterisation is most pointedly true in the case of technological development which came to be discussed in very controversial terms (Sklair 1970). On one hand, technologists expected their artefacts to increase the domination of nature and thus, improve the quality of human life.[2] On the other hand, people came to see many technologies as sources of evil whose false promises of heightened welfare tended to corrupt human virtues (Sieferle 1984). Critics' growing recognition of the drawbacks and imperfections inherent in technological innovations provided insight into the reverse side of progress. The growth of knowledge through science did not prevent unwanted outcomes of (technological) innovations. Rather epistemological gains led to an awareness, most commonly associated with Max Weber, in the nemesis of secular rationalisation. In other words, in a fully irreligious world people cannot attain knowledge about future events. Contemporary society's freedom from religious belief and commitment to modern science are responsible for the new paradox of knowledge – the more we learn about natural or social phenomena, the more we come to realise the magnitude of our ignorance. The present-day notion of risk emanates from this insight. Risk becomes associated with decisions and reflects the uncertainty of the outcomes of those decisions. We cannot attain total safety because it is an option based on decisions and consequently the 'search for safety' (Wildavsky 1988) becomes a risky endeavour in itself. Risk is a reflection of possible future unwanted outcomes of present decisions. Decision-makers become involved in the trading of possible detrimental

future states against well known and accepted present ones (Luhmann 1993). This new condition has prompted changes in the semantic treatment of technological progress. Progress is no longer certain, but becomes a probabilistic outcome of the application of instrumental rationality to economic, political, or technological problems (Bonß 1995).

Under such circumstances, the notion of technological risk is no longer associated primarily with the betterment of humankind, but is now often connected to dread and catastrophes (Perrow 1984). When decision-makers create new risks on the basis of an assessment of possible wanted and unwanted outcomes, decision-takers may view the same process as a danger because their evaluations were not part of the decision. One of the social consequences of the downfall of a positive risk image is the emergence of diverging and conflicting views of risk assessment and risk management. This loss of consensus leads to the final erosion of an unequivocal meaning of progress.

The idea that there is a dominant (and therefore, no longer unchallenged) interpretation of risk has surfaced only since the emergence and legitimation of dissident views of how to deal with risk in science and industry. In some cases, these alternative perspectives have become the ferment of social movements opposed to certain technological and ecological threats. This article discusses those social movements, referred to as 'risk movements', that have specialised in technological and environmental risks.

The following discussion directs its attention to the 'input' side of risk movements, specifically on how the political and cultural traditions of individual nations shape the interpretation that social movements have of society. The article places special emphasis on trying to understand how these ingrained patterns influence the concept of risk-avoidance in risk movements. The problem of technological and ecological risk prompts, as Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) have observed, debates about the good society. Social movements typically define their idealised, utopian vision of society in terms of community – a realm of solidarity and unity, of shared values and symbols.

Risk movements differ from other social actors (i.e., corporations, regulatory agencies, scientific groupings) in their perception of the preservation and extension of community. They customarily consider technological and ecological hazards that are thrust upon society in the name of a common welfare as threats to life-chances. Social movements consider the centre – be it the state, 'big industry', or 'big science' – as the cause for allegedly increased threats to life-chances and the survival of joint and responsible community.

MODERN RISKS AND MODERN RISK MOVEMENTS

Obviously, centre and periphery disagree about the notion of risk itself. Risk has become a prominent concept in modern societies since the departure from a

stable institutional and symbolic definition of social life-chances in pre-modern societies. Pre-modern societies knew many dangers, but few risks. Risk results from decisions made under uncertainty. Uncertainty stems from incomplete knowledge about all conditions and consequences of a decision; confidence to take risks results from the belief that knowledge can be attained. Risk is grounded in the anticipation that possible adverse effects may follow from a decision. We take risks, however, because we are accustomed to weighing the adverse effects of our decisions against their possible benefits. Further, we act in such a manner due to our expectation that the 'goods' that might result from a decision compensate and exceed the possible 'bads'.

This utilitarian calculus of risk has dominated most decision-making in modern society and it has become the view to which the centre routinely subscribes. This dominant notion of risk contains the implicit understanding that, at least in principle, the conditions of decisions are accountable, if not controllable. We derive the resultant concept of rationality from this practice of controlled risk-taking. For instance, Weber defined rationality as the weighing of means against ends and ends against ends. Social differentiation (the separation of economic from political or personal spheres) has made economic definitions of benefit institutionally independent of other concepts of benefit (such as pleasure or contentment).

Social differentiation has, however, not prevented the utilitarian idea of risk from being extended beyond its economic origin to scientific and political realms. Specifically-crafted institutions have traditionally contained most scientific risk-taking. The 'ivory tower' or laboratories devoted to esoteric research have prevented many critical research results from 'spilling' over into society. Over the course of the past several decades various experimental sciences have left the controlled research setting behind and have begun to treat 'society' as a laboratory. Modern biotechnologies are only the most prominent example of this new type of science (Krohn and Weyer 1990). This process has contributed to a widening pattern of distrust in the capacity of the centre (be it the state or private enterprise) to fulfil its primary objective, namely to create and uphold collective goods and to protect the community of citizens from social and political risks. In addition, during the twentieth century many individual (e.g., health) and common goods (e.g., safety) have become public goods because of the state's involvement in providing financial or legal resources or in directly managing these domains. The more the state becomes involved in common goods provision the greater is its vulnerability to critiques alleging failure to secure the integration of society.

It is in this climate of disaffection with the performance of the state (or private enterprise) in providing common goods that social movements emerge. They respond to problems that the current social and political institutions seem to be incapable of solving. Social movements normally seek resolution of these dilemmas in far-reaching reorganisations of society that will create new

mechanisms better able to intervene in addressing common good problems. Social movements are therefore opposed to those elites and organisations that are held responsible for the threats or the decline of common goods provision. The groups that form to advance the interests of social movements are characterised by loose organisational structures, informal membership roles, and little hierarchical differentiation. Social movements' utopian orientation distinguishes them from (single-issue) citizen initiatives, while their flexible institutional form differentiates them from more formal associations (e.g., political parties). Furthermore, social movements are notable for their use of strategies for delegitimising elites and this characteristic sets them off from public interest groups (see Halfmann 1989).

To understand the emergence of modern social movements it does not suffice to point only to the detrimental effects of state or private enterprise 'overstretch' in providing or protecting common goods. Citizen initiatives and public interest groups would also be appropriate responses within a framework of pluralist interest mediation. Modern social movements address yet another problem that Ralf Dahrendorf (1979) tried to capture in the notion of life-chances. Dahrendorf describes the modern social condition as the confluence of two processes: the dissolving of ligatures and the growth of options. Individualisation results from the loss of embeddedness in social milieus or classes and from the unleashing of possible options in a society that has lost the capacity for limiting peoples' choices to tractable levels. Both processes working in tandem turn individual decisions into biographical risks. By evoking the utopia of community, which offers ligatures and reduces options to manageable proportions, social movements present themselves as solutions to the modern form of disembeddedness. It is both promises – individual self-empowerment through participation in egalitarian activities and the societal utopia of a community of people – that provide social movements with a space in the political topology of modern society. Risk movements are one variant of this form of political expression to address threats to life-chances – those technological artefacts or environmental interventions that endanger the physical basis of community, the health and life of people.

Risk movements start from an expressed fear that in some areas risk-taking has grown out of control, especially in science and technology. Such concerns are also becoming increasingly pervasive with respect to (foreign) politics and this has given rise to another type of risk expression in the form of the peace movement. Participants in social movements believe that the unrestrained pursuit of risks in science and technology threatens both the natural environment and human life-chances. The protection of life-chances (for present and future generations) is the most general definition of a common good. For social movements the common good is the foundation of community and not the (possible) outcome of the utilitarian pursuit of individual life-chances (as the centre's idea of community suggests). Social movements interpret some risks –

such as nuclear energy, military strategies involving advanced weapons, and genetic engineering – to be dangers. In other words, we cannot control these areas of pursuit and we should avoid them. Furthermore, industrial managers and many scientists take certain activities, the archetypal example is nuclear power, to engender acceptable risks, while the lay public interprets them as fundamental dangers because the potential hazards are involuntary and appear to be imposed by others (i.e., government, industry).[3]

Risk movements propose that we should not undertake decisions entailing prospective harm – that is uncontrollable risks. This assessment combines with the belief that the loss of communal unity is the basis of modern hazards. The essence of this contention is that societies have given up a sense of equilibrium between humanity and nature and no longer possess the means for dealing prudently and responsibly with risks. While the centre's main 'risk question' is: 'How safe is safe enough?' (Schwing and Albers 1980), social movements ask: 'How many more risks should be taken?' The latter demand that we should deal morally with risks and should derive ethical standards for risk-decisions from the content and extent of life-chances that a community chooses at any given point in time. Obviously, the centre strongly disapproves of this periphery interpretation of risk because of fears about a decline in benefits and a loss of social differentiation if this alternative perspective becomes universally accepted.

After having introduced the concepts of risk and risk movements the following sections will develop my main argument – that the tradition of centre-periphery relations shapes the actions and perceptions of risk movements – in five steps. First, I will argue that it makes sense to describe the relations between risk movements and established risk actors in terms of centre-periphery interactions. It is only after I have made these connections that it is possible to compare the social and political responses to risk in different countries. Second, I will provide a brief comparative sketch of the main differences between the concept of community for the periphery and the centre in both the United States and Germany. Third, I elaborate the differences between risk management at the periphery and the centre in both countries. Fourth, an overview of the anti-nuclear movements in both countries will serve to illustrate the different politics of risk movements in the two countries. Finally, I offer a few concluding remarks.

TOWARD A COMPARISON OF RISK CULTURES: CENTRE AND PERIPHERY

Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky (1983) introduce the notions of centre and periphery into contemporary discourse on risk to describe a social topology of organisational principles. Institutions based on such foundations as markets, hierarchies, and egalitarian associations, serve to structure individual and collective views of risks. These institutions then allow for the crystallisation of

interest formulation and organisation and are, thus, essential for the creation of arenas for public conflicts. Douglas and Wildavsky distinguish between two types of institutions at the centre and one at the periphery. One centre institution is predicated upon individualistic principles (as found in markets) where risk is dependent upon and controlled by informed decisions. The other centre institution is based on hierarchical principles (as prevalent in large business firms and public bureaucracies) where risk perception is directed by trust in authority and expert knowledge. In contrast, the typical behaviour of the periphery is based on egalitarian principles (as common in voluntary organisations), where the perception of risks is shaped by values of conviviality and solidarity within relevant groups.

The distinction between centre and periphery is helpful for describing the logic of conflict over risks between, on one hand, firms and public administrations and, on the other hand, voluntary organisations. The topology is less convincing when it relates different principles of social organisation to degrees of relevance for the reproduction and stability of social order. Douglas and Wildavsky seem to imply that centre organisations are more important for upholding 'the present social system' (1983: 100) than peripheral organisations. They envisage a modern society that resembles the social topology of stratified societies. This vision typically consists of small political hierarchies at the top, an economic centre whose organisations determine the societal structure as a whole, and a large periphery of marginalised groups. In the case of modern, functionally differentiated society we cannot use the distinction between centre and periphery to describe social structure. Douglas and Wildavsky's distinction refers instead to social actors own simplifying self-description of social structure: public administrations see themselves as being positioned at the top of society, firms see themselves as organisations situated at the societal centre, and social movements see themselves as marginalised by and oppositional to a strong centre. The notions of centre and periphery are forms of self-description of macro-actors (organisations or social movements) that use these characterisations to maintain or expand their domains of influence.

There is no doubt that placing firms and public administrations at the centre and voluntary associations on the periphery can refer to older semantic traditions. Interestingly, the distribution of power and influence between the centre and the periphery, and the semantics accompanying this distribution, differ significantly between most European countries and the United States. In Europe, political commentators have historically equated the notion of societal centre with the state; this is not the case in the United States. As a result, American social movements are eccentric relative to a centre within civil society, while European social movements are eccentric vis-à-vis the institutions and symbols of public authority.

There are, however, important similarities between a European country, say Germany, and the United States. First, for both nations the establishment of a societal centre was a major historical problem, though this project, as we know

from history, had vastly different outcomes. Second, even though the idea of community appears to be an important feature of risk movements in the two countries, it has a definite political implication in Germany and a social meaning in the United States.

As a western European nation, Germany belongs to the tradition of 'state-centred systems' which, according to Dyson, 'have a historical and intellectual tradition of the state as an institution that embodies the 'public power' (1980: 19). Under such circumstances, both the centre's and the periphery's concepts of community are political, and community is either pursued or resisted through the state. As an Anglo-Saxon nation, the United States is – for lack of a better term – a 'civil-society-centred system' where the rules and institutions of the market and of voluntary organisations shape social life.[4] Accordingly, the concept of community is social and it is defined either in utilitarian or religious terms.[5]

Rather than giving a historical account of the emergence of centre-periphery relations in the United States and Germany, I will provide a stylised description of the main differences between the two countries. Such an approach should suffice as background for my discussion of the different approaches that risk movements have adopted to address the problem of preserving community in each national context.

Two traditions of community-building have historically competed for supremacy in the United States: voluntary organisations (with their Puritan religious origins) and the free market (as promoted by utilitarianism) (Hartz 1955). Within the religious tradition the betterment of humanity is expected to come from togetherness, while in the utilitarian tradition the common good is seen as emanating from the individual pursuit of happiness. While the utilitarian idea of community has clearly become the centre view of American society, the Puritan concept continues to make its presence felt. The centre's and the periphery's views of the common good are developed within society and, therefore, share the belief that (political) centralism and (power) monopolies which might exert control must be rejected.[6] As a consequence, society contains the political system in the United States and the political system has never been able to organise itself fully as a central state.

In Germany, the state has had a tradition of developing its own concept of societal community that it has then tried to export into society. The state conceived of itself and acted as a unifying and rationalising force in society. This integrative mission is not only expressed in German idealist philosophy such as Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' (1949), where the modern (Prussian) state is depicted as the highest form of an 'ethical community'. In relation to civil society the state, through its orientation toward universalistic values, can also supersede the centrifugal forces of civil society's particularism (see Perez-Diaz 1978). This concept was present in the Prussian idea of enlightened absolutism of the eighteenth century, as well as in the 1947 constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany. The modern practices of the German welfare state most

succinctly express the notions of state-directed organisation and integration of society. Over time, the welfare state has acquired traits of a central institution designed to realise an all-inclusive societal community (Swaan 1988). In this context the state is the only actor in society able to effectively counteract the asocial and conflicting passions and interests that dominate societal actions. Hence, ideas of community in Germany are state-oriented, either rejecting the state as a bonding force (as Marx and the radical Marxist tradition did) or epitomising the state as the only guarantee of unity (as the authoritarian state tradition did).

It is interesting to rediscover traces of these different traditions of community in social movements' most prevalent responses to risk in both the United States and Germany. Before discussing this problematic, the following section will describe about how the centre and the periphery treat risk differently.

ACTOR-SPECIFIC CONCEPTS OF RISK: LOW PROBABILITY vs HIGH CATASTROPHIC POTENTIAL

Non-moral or moral reference to risk indicates whether one places oneself at the centre or the periphery. Hierarchical organisations such as private enterprises, political parties, and bureaucracies position themselves in individualistically-oriented and competitively-driven systems of the centre. Voluntary organisations and social movements place themselves at the periphery because these groups need to build up and maintain permanently a consensus-based readiness to act. The periphery assesses the world according to criteria of the 'good and right life' that its members see as being threatened by certain risky practices or technologies. The strongly egalitarian strands of the American social movements seem closest to the practices of religious communalism. Similarly, the most egalitarian German social movements tend to adapt elements of the European socialist tradition (in both its leftist and rightist versions) of community.[7] The distinctions between European and American risk movements stem from differences in their respective visions of a more or less secularised utopia. While the idea of community in the American Puritan tradition is certainly as 'this-worldly' as the European socialist utopia, the religious norms pertain more directly to the activities of American social movements than to their European counterparts. For instance, the strong commitment to non-violence in the American anti-nuclear movement speaks to this variation.

The risk perceptions of the centre and the periphery are evidently controversial. Dissent in the assessment of risk is based on different strategic preferences for the 'right' social order, that is on what Douglas and Wildavsky refer to as different concepts of an 'ideal society'. Three different types of risk actors – two centre-related and one peripheral – compete for the control of risk management (Rayner 1984). First, *market-oriented* risk actors include technological risks in

the general uncertainties generated by atomised decisions – therefore, private enterprises prefer quantitative and expert-led assessment of risks. Second, *bureaucratic* risk actors rely on established techniques of breaking-up and incrementally addressing risk problems and this gives rise to a preference for symbolic and financial compensation for the consequences of risks. Finally, *egalitarian* risk actors (such as social movements) that consider technological and ecological risks to be faults of the entire industrial system strive for the elimination of the alleged causes of risks (i.e., 'big industry', principles of competition and profit-seeking, international rivalry). These actors expect that the extension of their own consensual style to the larger society would prevent these risks.

The centre downplays risks with low probability and long-term effects, but relies successfully on the continuation of its rules and strategies. The periphery concentrates on risks with high catastrophic potential and attacks the centre for ignoring this aspect of risky technologies. In this sense, while the periphery expects dramatic discontinuities, it has difficulty keeping its members on permanent alert. The differences between the centre and the periphery become most obvious for technologies with risk properties that are characterised by low probabilities of failure, but high catastrophic potential (e.g., civil nuclear power plants, certain chemical processes, military systems with atomic weapons, genetic engineering). The centre always points to the long record of error-free operations and the minimal chance of an accident, while the periphery insists on the irreversible damages in case of an untoward incident.

This pattern of actor-specific risk assessment applies to all western industrial societies. The specific character of the situation resides in the periphery's permanent chance to create resonance for its appeals in the centre and, thus, to turn conflicts about risk into controversies about the 'regeneration' of social order. The United States has a tradition of 'politicising nature' and the exploitation and the preservation of nature are equally evocative features of the American cultural heritage (Kitschelt 1985: 251). The sectarian ingredient in the tradition of 'politicised nature' is to make a connection between the conservation of nature and the avoidance of 'pollution'. Douglas and Wildavsky point to the connection between risk and utopian concepts of society: 'Generally, pollution ideas are the product of an ongoing political debate about the ideal society' (1983:36).[8]

The persistence of the Puritan tradition in the United States, which is preserved at the periphery, adds a 'spiritual' dimension to the interpretation of risk (Bellah et al. 1986, especially chapters 8 and 9).[9] The religious millenarism that in earlier times sought 'redemption' and 'regeneration' through an emphasis on egalitarian and pious community re-emerges in some respects in the secularised debate about technological risks. These forms of expression provide clues and metaphors to a critique of the American way of life as interpreted and enacted by the centre. The periphery can find resonance in the centre because it combines

its aversion to technological and ecological risks with a refutation of centralised and monopolised power in the economic and political realm. At least on an ideological and symbolic level the centre and the periphery unanimously disapprove of centralism that might lead to overall control. It is for this reason that the American social movements of the 1970s and 1980s could carry their concept of risk from the periphery into the centre of society. One should add that the politics of risk regulation in the American political system provided opportunities for peripheral actors to take issue with administrative decisions. As Sheila Jasanoff (1986) shows in her analysis of the regulation of carcinogens, the politics of public accountability at the state level invited controversy and allowed political interventions from interest groups and social movements.

In Germany, risk management has traditionally resulted from cooperative interactions between science and government and this process has been shielded to some degree from public attention and influence (for the regulation of carcinogenic risks in Germany see Jasanoff 1986). Since the centre derives authority (and its legality to act) from majority rule, social movements essentially have three options: 1) to make their claims a majority position; 2) to question the legality of governmental decisions; or 3) to establish new criteria of legitimacy in risk-management problems. Since the first path was virtually impossible and the second option only achieved marginal gains, German risk movements chose the last strategy. Much of the intellectual reasoning within the risk movements centred around the question of whether it was appropriate for the government to rely on majority rule in questions of 'life and death' and whether questions of 'existential' importance (such as nuclear catastrophes) gave to minorities special veto privileges. The main ideological and strategic topic within the German risk movements, therefore, has been about how to challenge the claims of the state that it acted legitimately – in the name of the whole society – when deciding about risks that might adversely affect all, but benefit only some, societal members (Halfmann 1988).

ANTI-NUCLEAR MOVEMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND GERMANY

To illustrate the differences of centre-periphery relations in specific national contexts this section offers a brief examination of the social movements against the civil use of nuclear energy (the anti-nuclear movement) in the United States and Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. Due to my rather restrictive definition of a social movement, I will only discuss those activities against this form of power production that belong in the category of 'direct action' movements (for the American case) or 'autonomous' movements (for the German case). Even though some goals of the more strictly organised 'public interest groups' or conventional conservationist organisations overlap with the social movement's

objectives, many commentators on American anti-nuclear protest notice the strict difference between these two types of protest (see, for instance Shabecoff 1993; Dowie 1996). By restricting the analysis to the social movement segment I obviously do not give a full picture of anti-nuclear protest – this more comprehensive picture has already been painted elsewhere (see especially Kitschelt 1986; Rucht 1990; Joppke 1993). Since I am interested in the images of community and in the resonance of periphery notions of community in the centre I will focus on social movements (as the self-styled 'true' periphery of society) rather than on 'licensed' political players such as conservationist organisations or public interest groups.

A. United States

Public interest groups taking action against nuclear energy programmes emerged in the United States prior to the anti-nuclear movement proper. Beginning in the mid-1960s, energy became a theme of public controversy in the wake of an opening-up of the American political system to popular political initiatives (Joppke 1993: 54-55). In the beginning, public interest groups were unable to influence directly decision-making processes in energy policy. The organisations concentrated instead on the 'judicial process and congressional lobbying' (Joppke 1993: 56). Nonetheless, the possible threat of media attention pressured the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to keep up its procedural standards for supervising nuclear power facilities. The public interest groups broadened their scope of influence when they adopted Ralph Nader's consumer advocacy tactics in the mid-1970s by directly 'lobbying Congress and state legislatures, participating in election campaigns, and organising direct voter referenda' (Joppke 1993: 62).

Public interest and advocacy groups such as Ralph Nader's 'Critical Mass' or the Union of Concerned Scientists were geared toward using all possible avenues of legitimate political intervention, especially by invoking the possibilities of federalism to obstruct the policy aims in Washington, while at the same time accepting the institutional context of American politics. Mark Dowie, an analyst sympathetic to social movement aims, relates the limited success of anti-nuclear protest in the 1970s and 1980s to a politics of 'accommodation and capitulation' (1996: 6). According to this interpretation, both public interest groups and mainstream environmentalist organisations such as the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, and the National Audubon Society backed away from strong commitments to retain their positions as reasonable interlocutors with federal agencies. What distinguishes the direct action movement of the late-1970s from public interest groups and conventional environmentalism is the pursuit of a 'politics of moral example and communal empowerment' (Joppke 1993:78) in the Puritan tradition. Participants in the anti-nuclear movement placed themselves in the tradition of the civil rights and the anti-Vietnam war

protest movements. National organisations such as Friends of the Earth, or regional groups such as the 'Clamshell Alliance' in Massachusetts and the 'Abalone Alliance' in California, took up the position of upholding a peripheral heritage that emphasised the egalitarian basis of their protest and the negligence of large bureaucratic structures.

The particularity of the American anti-nuclear movement was based on its egalitarian thrust, namely to use non-violent, grass-roots activities as demonstrations of how a good society can function. No doubt the movement also pursued less abstract goals, such as blocking the government's nuclear programme. However, the goal of these activities – distinct from public interest politics – was not only to prevent the further construction of nuclear power plants. Also essential to the social movement were efforts to undermine the workings of conventional politics by applying civil disobedience tactics. The anti-nuclear movement not only wanted 'to slow down the momentum of established policies, but also to disorganise and finally to stall them' (Kitschelt 1985:278). Movement organisations interpreted their actions, in one respect, as preventing technological disaster. A complementary objective was to bar big industries' purported collaboration with government to establish a centralised 'plutonium-state'. But perhaps even more important was the building of egalitarian activists' groups, a strategy that related directly to the idea that the good society is based on the empowerment of people on the local level. Therefore, beyond the immediate goals of preventing the construction of nuclear power plants the long-term vision of the anti-nuclear movement in the United States referred to 'a society based on decentralised communities and small social units' (Joppke 1993: 79; see also Ladd, Hood and Van Liere 1983).

The American risk movement that coalesced around the issue of nuclear power focused on changing or influencing risk policies to safeguard the building of a peaceful and egalitarian community. For these movements, the federal government's energy policy was only one indicator of the state working in concert with big industry to increase the dangers to the perseverance of community. But as the movement concept of community was non-political (in the sense that it was not state-, but civil society-oriented), American anti-nuclear protesters did not attempt to reach the centres of political power to alter the political institutions of risk management.

B. Germany

In Germany, risk movements around nuclear power had no other choice but to directly confront the state. The post-war German state may no longer be a classical strong state because of the federal dilution of power and governmental dependence on the compliance of relevant interest organisations in political decision-making (Katzenstein 1987). With respect to policy output the German state is weak, but with respect to issue input the state remains the central address

in politics. The publicly recognised interest organisations and the constitutionally privileged parties shield the state from political issues emerging from outside channels. Under the impression of the terrorist violence of the Red Army Faction, a militant group of the post-student movement era, the government was particularly inimical to oppositional movements.

The emerging anti-nuclear movement found itself facing strong opposition from this political constellation during the 1970s and protesters frequently confronted the police when they tried to voice their opposition. The movement began as scattered citizen initiatives that, like their American counterparts, wanted to prevent specific nuclear energy projects – for example, the construction of particular power plants or the exploration of possible storage sites for nuclear wastes. However, these protest activities met strong resistance. The state tried to deny the initiatives' political legitimacy and to defer the social movement's ambitions of participating in formal decision-making processes. When the conflict over nuclear energy arose in the 1970s, the state had already made the key decisions about the programme of civil nuclear energy (Radkau 1983). The state's strong reaction to anti-nuclear protest resulted from the assumed economic role of nuclear power during the aftermath of the crisis over Middle East oil imports. The Social Democratic government considered nuclear energy to be a cornerstone of the country's policy of economic modernisation and energy independence (Hauff and Scharpff 1975).

German law prevents collective bodies (e.g., interest groups or social movements) from taking legal action against government decisions. In the case of nuclear sites, only individuals able to prove that they are directly affected by a power plant can object to these projects. Even though licensing procedures provide individual claimants with opportunities to block the construction of particular facilities, in the early stage of the conflict state officials often tried to out-manoeuvre critical citizens. This strategy sparked the anger of local residents and set the stage for the future polarisation of movement-state relationships. German anti-nuclear protest started during the 1970s as a reaction to the lay public's frustrated hopes of being heard by government authorities (Rucht 1980). The first important mobilisation occurred in 1975 in Wyhl, a small town of vineyards where the state of Baden-Württemberg planned to construct a nuclear-power installation. The local protest was motivated by fears that changes to the micro-climate produced by the power plant's tall cooling towers might endanger the quality of the wine. Protesters addressed their concerns to the state authorities for two reasons.

First, residents learned that the government planners had ignored their objections to the facility at a public hearing that the state was required to conduct prior to licensing the construction. Second, since the state owned shares in the electric utility that the power plant was to serve it had a direct interest in the successful outcome the project. When the government threatened to expropriate forcibly land owned by the community of Wyhl for the power plant, the whole

region seemed to be united in protest. With the start of construction protesters occupied the site for ten months until the court ultimately revoked the construction permit (Nelkin and Pollak 1981: 61-64; Joppke 1993: 97-101).

In the case of Wyhl, as with other significant conflicts over nuclear energy at Brokdorf and Gorleben, it was the state as interested party – both in the sense of having stakes in the electric utilities as well as in the energy policy – which prompted the protest and often kept it alive by its statist intransigence. This obduracy attracted activists from the student movement to the nuclear conflict and these campaigners introduced a more theoretically informed anti-statism into the social movement. This new constituency added the concept of violent resistance against the state to nuclear protest. The struggles over the planned nuclear utility in Brokdorf, a village near Hamburg, and over the projected nuclear storage facility in Gorleben in Lower Saxony were characterised by violent fights between the police and demonstrators (Nelkin and Pollak 1981: 64-67; Joppke 1993: 101-116). The militancy of movement activists was a product of their perceived lack of alternatives. Their belief was that an uncompromising state, in pursuing a life-threatening energy policy, had lost legitimacy and needed to be confronted head-on. But despite strong and violent opposition to the federal government's nuclear programme in the 1970s, the social movement's actions themselves did not change government policy.

The illusory character of violent struggle dawned on those activists who eventually sought to increase their political clout by founding a political party that could effectively influence the politics of common goods. However, the eventual outgrowth of an ecological party from the anti-nuclear (and peace) movement changed not only the political landscape of the German system of party rule, but also the general awareness about ecological and technological risks. Only by shaping the public mood about environmental risks and increasing environmental awareness in Parliament were the Greens able to change the government's nuclear policy.

To summarise the above discussion and to capture succinctly the essence of the differences between American and German social movements, I reproduce two poignant quotes from the respective social movements' literature.

> *American:* 'In each new country we would try to find people with the right bias toward the planet and the things that live on it, people who also had a gift of leadership to match their devotion, people who knew what would work in their respective countries. The principal co-ordination would be spiritual, with one goal – the preservation, restoration, and rational use of the earth.' (David Brower of Friends of the Earth in 1971 as quoted in Douglas and Wildavsky 1983: 136.)

> *German:* 'The struggle for a humane future and for a life-protecting civilisation requires more than diverting the imminent hazards. It requires that we provide a positive answer to the question of how we want to live...We shall no longer surrender our future to the state and industry. We want to devise by ourselves alternatives for

> the future, and we want to explore the conditions for the realisation of these alternatives.' (Freiburg Institute for Applied Ecology as quoted in Guggenberger 1980: 8.)

Both statements reveal the strong presence of a utopian vision of societal community within the respective social movements. In the American passage, David Brower emphasises the spiritual aspect of community which will guarantee that the life-chances of all members of the community will be protected once the struggle for a risk-free and peaceful society has been won. In the German case, the idea is to wrest control over risky technologies away from a state (and industry) that seemingly lacks a sense of responsibility for the common good. The implication here is that the state once may have legitimately represented the common good, but no longer does.

CONCLUSION

American and German risk movements differ in their symbolic and strategic orientation. Social mobilisation around risk in the United States associates technological and ecological risks with the dangers of destroying nature and corrupting the right way of living, but it does not primarily seek solutions to this problem by changing the organisation of the political process. Activists either attempt to influence specific policies or to weaken the promotional interests behind such initiatives by imposing costly defence strategies on their opponents. At the same time, American risk movements rally for a return to 'simpler' forms of communitarian and egalitarian life. Under such circumstances, we will observe very few attempts at constituting a 'movement centre' in terms of party organisations (Kitschelt 1985: 292). Social movements in the United States can establish channels for a partial consensus with the centre in resisting centralisation and monopolies (in markets and politics). In contrast, German social movements have to overcome high thresholds before society accepts them as viable political actors. Of the two possible avenues to influence issue input in the German political system – media attention and political parties – only the latter can promise long-term effects. It comes as no surprise that movement entrepreneurs banded together eventually to found the Green Party whose original intent was to confront the ecological dangers of modern industrial society.

The origins of the concept of community are social in the United States and political in Germany. Furthermore, even though modern American risk movements are secular, and collective action is influenced by utilitarian and republican ideas, their notion of community remains 'spiritual' rather than political. Similarly, even though German risk movements are very much influenced by 'cosmological' concepts of a union of nature and humanity, the struggles have a distinctly political character. In other words, these conflicts are about how to

establish (or to deny) legitimacy (for the movement or for the state) in managing a common good.

The divergent concepts of community in the two countries create different centre-periphery relations, and consequently social movements have distinctive impacts on the centre. In Germany, social movement opposition to technological risks led, on one hand, to the foundation of an 'anti party-party', the Greens, and, on the other hand, the emergence of so-called 'autonomous' groups with anarchist leanings. Both wings attempted to challenge the legitimacy of the state in providing and protecting public goods such as health and safety (i.e., life-chances). German risk movements (and their party manifestation) must direct their challenge toward the state which – in the eyes of the activists – has lost the ability or the interest to provide and protect common goods in society.

In the United States, social movements opposing technological and environmental risks distanced themselves from the public interest groups that favoured lobbyist and legal strategies. As 'grass-roots initiatives' and 'direct-action groups' the risk movement attempted to disorganise their opponents by forcing them to set aside resources for defending their assets. The most visible effect of the public interest movements was the improvement of health and safety regulations and the abandonment of public support for certain industries dealing with risky technologies. The protection of the common good in the American context is, however, not associated with questions of the legitimacy of the state, as is the case in Germany. Success in the United States is defined in issue-specific terms.

Risk movements have to negotiate the tension between their interest in preventing specific hazards and their aspiration for establishing a risk-free community of citizens. It appears that the American risk movements have better chances to ward off specific hazards, but will hardly be able to impose their spiritual concept of community fully on the centre. Risk movements in the United States will not change society because they are already an accepted – albeit peripheral – part of it. German risk movements must somehow put into practice (at least rudimentarily) their utopia of political community if they want the centre to hear them. Social movements in Germany have to fight for inclusion into the centre (i.e., the state) before they can try to change risk policies.

Risk actors derive their self-perception of being either part of the centre or the periphery from their experiences of belonging to the majority or minority in questions of risk assessment and risk management. Social movements apprehend themselves as minorities that wish to deny the majority actors' continued occupation of the centre stage. The advantage of American risk movements seems to be that in pursuing their struggles they do not have to take the detour via the state. They can instead directly appeal to the notions of egalitarian community that the centre actors share with them to a certain degree. German social movements need to challenge the state's concept of community before they can successfully pursue their issue-specific goals.

By the mid-1980s the civil nuclear energy programmes in both the United States and West Germany had come to a virtual halt, in part due to the successes of the respective anti-nuclear movements (Joppke 1993: 131). In both nations, risk movements organised around nuclear power have not survived their achievements largely because the identity of a social movement stems from its alarmist stance. When a social movement can no longer distinguish itself sufficiently from the rest of society, when relevant actors or substantial segments of the populace have adopted the movement's convictions, when the social movement is victorious, it looses its *raison d'être*.[10] Risk movements have changed the politics of risk management, not the least through the mediation of the social scientific notion of risk as a culturally constructed form of expectations about consequences of decisions. Current changes in American risk regulation, for instance, allow for the integration of political deliberation into the decision-making process. These developments mean that not only scientific expertise, but also lay assessments, become relevant in management of risk (Jasanoff 1999). As a consequence, the particular movements tend to disappear from public attention until the next issue arises which qualifies for a new attempt at organising protest against perceived threats to life-chances.[11]

NOTES

[1] Since the Chernobyl accident radioactive radiation has a definitely catastrophic connotation. It might seem bizarre that a few decades earlier people sincerely believed in the therapeutic effects of so-called 'radium-poultices', while at the same time they perceived atomic weapons as the ultimate danger for humankind. During the 1950s and 1960s, medical experts reported numerous cases of skin cancer caused by 'radium-poultices' that patients had used for years to treat various illnesses such as rheumatism and asthma (Born 1967).

[2] 'It is this dynamic character of technology that makes it so significant for the idea of progress. The latter assumes that mankind has been slowly advancing from a crude stage of primitive civilisation, the former demonstrates what can be accomplished by exhibiting its achievements and disclosing its working methods' (Beard 1955: xxiii).

[3] Refer to Luhmann (1993: 21-28) for the distinction between 'risk' and 'danger'.

[4] Dyson defines the term 'stateless society' to mean 'a society that lacks a historical and legal tradition of the state as an institution that 'acts' in the name of public authority' (1980: viii). This is certainly not to say that there is no state in the United States, but rather only means that the state is not the cultural and social centre of society.

[5] Voluntary organisations, therefore, are of great importance for the social inclusion of citizens in the United States. In Germany, state-mediated organisations of the social state system play this role.

[6] Huntington believes that distrust of the state is part of the 'American Creed'. This aspect of identity is 'liberal, individualistic, democratic, egalitarian, and hence basically anti-government and anti-authority in character' (Huntington 1981: 4). Despite institutional reforms, the American state still appears to political scientists as a 'hapless giant' (Skowronek 1982: 290).

[7] Rejection of the consequences of social differentiation and individualisation was very similar among left and right wing movements of the twentieth century. Both types of movements shared a 'unitary (*Einheits*-) semantic' of society as a community of equals. This is not meant to deny the very important differences between left and right movements of that period.

[8] Douglas and Wildavsky believe that the use of religious metaphors is a general trait of social movements. It seems, however, that this characteristic applies only to American social movements. Refer to the discussion in Halfmann (1988: 25).

[9] No doubt there is a critique of technological and ecological risks that is very close to the policies and institutions of the centre. The techniques of lobbyism and litigation that organisations such as the Sierra Club, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and Physicians for Social Responsibility regularly employ speak to this fact. However, the rhetoric and philosophy, even of these groups of the so-called 'public interest-movement' sector, stem from the periphery (Vogel 1980/1: 11).

[10] The life-span of a social movement is not so much determined by the attention that the media grant issues (Downs 1972), but by the capability of a movement to prevent internal dissensus and to maintain the semantic difference of the protest issue with the rest of society (Halfmann and Japp 1993). Obviously, social movements are marked by a paradox, namely their rise depends on, among other factors, dissensus with majority opinions on critical issues. However, the more acceptance the movement's interpretations find within the wider public, the greater is the likelihood that the social movement is ultimately doomed to fade.

[11] In Germany, small groups of protesters have continued the struggle against the shipment of spent nuclear fuel rods and other radioactive waste to reprocessing and interim-storage facilities during the 1990s. However, these groups no longer mobilise large numbers of followers.

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