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Inside political action: a proposal for investigating the internal problems of collective action

Por dentro da ação política: uma proposta de investigação dos problemas internos da ação coletiva

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Abstract

This text aims to develop a research agenda to analyze the internal problems of collective action based on the theoretical contributions of French pragmatic sociology. Following a brief presentation of this approach, I argue that focusing on the dimension of agency (both human and non-human), critical moments, the value-driven dimension of social life, and the role of devices in social relations can theoretically and methodologically enrich empirical research on collective action, drawing on the classic bibliography of social movement theories.

Keywords: collective action; pragmatic sociology; social movements theories.

Resumo

O presente texto tem como objetivo elaborar uma agenda de pesquisa para analisar os problemas internos da ação coletiva com base nos aportes teóricos da sociologia pragmática. A partir de uma breve apresentação de tal corrente, argumento que a concentração sobre a dimensão da agência (humana e não humana), sobre os momentos críticos, sobre a dimensão valorativa da vida social e sobre o papel dos dispositivos nas relações sociais pode enriquecer teórica e metodologicamente pesquisas empíricas sobre ação coletiva orientadas pela bibliografia clássica das teorias dos movimentos sociais.

Palavras-chave: ação coletiva; sociologia pragmática; teorias dos movimentos sociais.

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1 Introduction[2]

Studying collective action within the Social Sciences field usually means dealing with a diverse typology of actions undertaken by one or more social groups. These actions take place over an indeterminate period - ranging from those considered stable and "crystallized", such as political parties (Secco, 2011), to those considered "brief" and spontaneous, such as protests, manifestations, and certain social movements (Pinheiro-Machado, 2019). As I plan on demonstrating later, for over a century, many authors have focused on analyzing the characteristics and particularities of the different types of collective action, especially regarding the external elements that limit, constrain, or enable such endeavors. Thereby, many of the questions raised by this literature regarding the building and organizing of collective action tend to address social phenomena and material aspects that remain "outside" the internal dynamics that underpin this kind of social action – such as the State, political and institutional shifts, technological development, connections with other social movements, etc.

Indeed, to think about collective action is usually to think about some "external issues" that contribute to certain social actors engaging in such actions. This is observable in urban violence cases – in a series of deaths caused by a gas leak (Corrêa, 2009), in the genetically modified organisms' issue (Stengers, 2015), and in the economic crisis debate of the last decades (Harvey *et al.*, 2012). In other words, some phenomena are understood as if a determined number of individuals is *mismatched* from their daily life routine and, through this configuration, get identified as *problems* that prompt the collective engagement around a specific *cause* whose nature relates more or less with the issue at hand.

Still, it is not difficult to imagine that social actors who choose to engage in collective action also face challenges that did not previously exist—that is, before deciding to undertake a collective endeavor. This type of impasse is not necessarily related to the "external" issue that gave rise to the action. A simple yet effective example is a collective opposing natural resource exploitation and climate threats. Such a group may face challenges like scheduling conflicts among participants when organizing regular meetings or securing an accessible venue for all members to attend these meetings. These challenges are unrelated to the issue that made these people get together in a political organization. Beyond logistic matters, internal dissent facing the group's stance and orientation, as well as task delegation processes usually do not directly affect the "external issue" that has given rise to the collective action itself, but it impacts the group's daily activities. If this is true, we can consider that there is a series of challenges that only arise after the moment in which the collective action is established - that is, challenges from "within" the collective action that regards its own internal dynamics[3].

[2] I appreciate the comments and critiques from the anonymous reviewers, who greatly collaborated with this paper's enhancement. Nevertheless, I assert that any possible argumentative inconsistencies are my own doing.

[3] I want to thank my colleagues from the Círculo de Estudos da Ideia e da Ideologia (CEII) e from the Instituto de Outros Estudos (IOE), both organizations of which I've been part of in the last few years and that have made me not only think about such issues (and discover a new research interest) but also handle them in practice, since our scarce resources of time and money revealed themselves as significant challenges for maintaining these collective projects' activities.

Through an exclusively theoretical discussion, this paper aims to suggest a research path that assumes this type of challenge as the object of investigation. This isn't an innovative proposal. As I plan on showing, the field's most classical theories, such as the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), the Political Process Theory (PPT), and the New Social Movements Theory (NSMT), deal with the issue of collective action internal problems in their terms. More recently, studies like Polletta (2002, 2006, 2020) and Ghaziani e Kretschmer (2018) shed light on central topics concerning the "insides" of collective action groups – such as creating solidarity ties among members and dealing with their conflicts. Besides, as is the case with this paper, other collective action researchers have devoted themselves to bringing together more classical sociological theories with pragmatic approaches – whether related to the North American philosophical pragmatism[4] (Fernandes, 2023) or pragmatic sociology (Andion *et al.*, 2017; Castro, 2024).

In line with such research, I emphasize the importance of the internal dimension of collective action for the sociological study of social movements, political parties, civil society organizations, and related entities. I also highlight the pragmatic sociology program as *one of the possible* theoretical approaches for guiding empirical research dedicated to these issues. I reinforce the usefulness of this theory because it gives special attention to (a) the human and non-human agency dimensions; (b) critical moments in everyday life; (c) the value-driven dimension of social reality; and (d) the role that devices play in social relations. Although they are far from encompassing all features of pragmatic sociology[5], I believe that these aspects indicate meaningful paths for analyzing collective action, especially when combined with classical approaches to social movements, as I plan to demonstrate further in this paper.

Methodologically, I base my analysis on a non-systematic literature review of classical theories of collective action, namely the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT), the Political Process Theory (PPT), and the New Social Movements Theory (NSMT). From this method, I briefly present some of these approaches' original works, as well as the main underpinnings of pragmatic sociology. With this, I hope that the conceptual discussion may serve as a consistent framework for all those interested in investigating the challenges inherent to the task of coordinating human action.

2 Classical Theories of Collective Action

2.1 The Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)

During the first half of the twentieth century, collective actions were often characterized as "blind and irrational answers from individuals disoriented by the transformation processes generated by the industrial society" (Gohn, 2014, p. 24). The theories that upheld these arguments had behavioral perspectives and

[4] Silva, Cotanda and Pereira (2017) highlight the North American influence over the development of the goffmanian concept of "interpretative frameworks". According to the authors, it presents a great analytical potential for investigating processes by which social movements are forged and sustained through time. For another reflection on the relations between philosophical pragmatism and interactionist sociological approaches, see Shalin (1986, 1991).

[5] For a deeper and more detailed debate about his approach, see Lemieux (2018).

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some early reflections of social psychology[6] as their basic guidelines. Thus, regardless of their particularities, and since they represented the "individuals' psychological reactions to changes – reactions deemed as irrational behaviors" (Gohn, 2014, p. 24), collective movements were assumed to be "movements external to society's normal institutions" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 31).

In this sense, scholars who dedicated themselves to the analysis of collective manifestations implicitly shared the idea that the social fabric corresponded to a "static social order that has to be controlled" (Gohn, 2014, p. 40). Thus, "the social anomie idea was always very much present" (Gohn, 2014 p. 24), and the social movements accounted not only for "a strange and foreign object to historical subjects" (Gohn, 2014, p. 40) but also for elements that were potentially divisive to social order.

With Neil Smelser's work[7] (1995, p. 23), the studies on collective action start to gradually change direction. The author argued that "the characteristics that define collective behaviors are not psychological", but *social*. Nevertheless, Smelser still considered the emergence of collective manifestations as non-conventional behavior, since they "differ from everyday life behavior" (Gohn, 2014, p. 45) and occur "outside the individual's daily routine" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 32). Furthermore, and still strongly inspired by psychology studies, this theory closely associated social movements with certain "disturbances" in the political and economic order, in a way that they represented "inadequate cognitive responses to structural tensions that emerged from modernization" (Gohn, 2014, p. 45). Thereby, collective action was assumed as an indicator of certain "societal dysfunctions" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 32), pushing the issue of "individual deprivation" to the center of this approach's analysis.

In contrast with Smelser's perspective, the Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) became prominent in the field of social movements studies during the seventies. Drifting apart from the perspective oriented by social psychology and behavioral studies, this theory "examines the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the social movements' connections with other groups, and the movements' dependency on external support to succeed" (McCarthy; Zald, 1977, p. 1213). It also analyzes the necessary conditions for an organization to "promote common interests among groups of individuals" (Olson, 2015, p. 19).

Therefore, the TMR represents a relevant milestone in the studies of collective action, mainly because its exponents – inspired by microeconomics – began to characterize collective manifestations not as irrational operations or activities fully driven by emotional and cognitive elements, but as *rational* actions shaped by the actor's objective calculation on the benefits and costs related to collective engagement. In this regard, the theoretical movement contributes to the establishment of a sort of "epistemological dignity" of collective action as a research object – given that collective manifestations are now embedded in habitual practices and operations mobilized by social actors in their everyday lives.

[6] See Freud (2010, 2011) for a more explicit psychosocial analysis of mass phenomena.

[7] It is worth noting that a historical reading of the field of collective action studies reveals the existence of multiple theoretical approaches, which, due to the scope of this paper, will not be explored here. Check Gohn (2014) and Alonso (2009) for a closer look at this diversity of theories. Also, see Andion *et al.* (2017, p. 374) for a synthesis on the main characteristics of the theoretical approaches on collective action.

For these reasons, TMR presents inquiries regarding the "close connection between preexisting discontent and generalized beliefs on the rise of the social movement phenomenon" (McCarthy; Zald, 1977, p. 1214). According to the approach's authors, discontent is not a "scarce resource" in social life – on the contrary, usually what is missing for the emergence and stabilization of social movements is the access to organizational elements and resources, such as time and money. Additionally, they also recognize that "claims and discontent can be defined, created, and manipulated by organizations and corporations" (McCarthy; Zald, 1977, p. 1215).

Hence, if the first social movement's theories parted from inquiries about the motivations that underpin the outbreak of collective phenomena (their *why*), the TMR approach is interested in the means by which actors can form collective actions – that is, "their *how*" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 34, emphasis mine). Consequently, – despite the strong rationalist nature of their authors, who were influenced by the emergence of the Rational Choice Theory that emerged in the same period (Baert; Silva, 2023, p. 175-215) – this type of approach opens up important avenues for reflection on some internal issues of collective action and the sustainment of different types of organizations, such as member engagement and resources' scarcity (mainly economic ones).

Similar to the debates carried out by the TMR theory, the social scientist and economist Mancur Olson (2015, p. 19) developed the idea that collective actions only make sense if the individual action is not able to "correspond to the individual's interests as well as, or better than, the organization". In this sense, *the bigger* the challenges for an individual to pursue their interest acting *alone* and isolated, *the more meaningful* the collective action's strength. This became one of the main issues in Olson's work, especially with the "free-rider problem", an expression that was developed to reflect on the asymmetries of individual contributions from the members of a collective movement. By mobilizing the *homo economicus* model – that is, the rational actor that is constantly in pursuit of maximizing their benefits and minimizing the costs of their actions – Olson argues that, from the standpoint of this social actor, it makes more sense to benefit from the group's activities without contributing individually to its collective causes. That is, if it is possible to enjoy the products of collective action without putting in any effort and to "free ride" in other members' engagement, then the rational actor tends to choose such an option.

As political scientists Bennett and Segerberg (2012, p. 749) explain,

> Olson's puzzling observation was that, indeed, one cannot expect that people will act together only because they share a common problem or objective. He argued that, in big groups in which individual contributions are less perceptive, rational individuals take advantage of others' efforts: it is more economical to not contribute if you can enjoy the goods without contributing.

Indeed, if we consider the relevance of the 'free-rider problem,' it is worth questioning the feasibility of collective action: how can a specific group advocating for a particular cause sustain itself over time? How can the asymmetries in

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individual contributions among group members be mitigated? For Olson, the solution to this type of problem lies in the possibility of an organization obtaining resources that allow for the fulfillment of individual incentives or coercive tools that contribute to making the cost of individual participation lower than the one of enjoying other people's efforts.

2.2 The Political Process Theory (PPT)

TMR's Weberian inspiration and its *homo economicus* transposition to the collective action field, sparked a series of critical reactions that have contributed to the development of a new approach, the Political Process Theory (PPT). This theory's scholars agree with TMR when considering that "the degree to which a group is resourceful or well-connected influences their opportunities" (Jasper, 2016, p. 50). However, unlike TMR, PPT steps "outside" organizations and focuses on the structure of political opportunities, which vary historically. Thus, this approach's main argument is that "the changes in political opportunities and restraints create the most important incentives for launching new confrontation phases" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 24). Indeed, the idea of confrontation is defined as the central concept of collective action in its diverse forms (Santos, 2012, p. 309).

The PPT theory links the collective action studies with a strong institutionalist approach oriented by *macro structural* political phenomena and by the State's central role. This is because it appreciates the fact that "social movements develop themselves inside the limits posed by prevailing structures of political opportunity" (Tilly; Tarrow; McAdam, 2009, p. 26). Afterward, during the 1990s, these authors undertook a true "relational spin" (Bringel, 2012, p. 49) in their research. By developing the *Contentious Politics* collective project - "product of a theoretical self-criticism from the major PPT authors" (Pereira, 2020, p. 4) - their studies on collective action began to slowly shed more light into the "constitution of chains of social interdependence" (Alonso, 2009, p. 73) that inform political mobilization.

Thereby, Tarrow, Tilly e McAdam invested in building a "broader analysis of contentious collective action" (Bringel, 2012, p. 52), expanding the analytical field to encompass political conflicts that occur in non-institutionalized spaces (Alonso, 2009, p. 76). Then, issues related to collective action appear as dependent on "shared understandings, dense social networks, and connective structures" (Tarrow, 2009, p. 27), opening up space for the establishment of a deeper connection between the PPT theoretical framework and the internal dynamics of social movements, which is particularly relevant to the attempts proposed in this paper. One of the fundamental concepts of this approach is the idea of "repertoires of collective action", developed and broadly mobilized by Charles Tilly. To some extent, the term draws attention to some of the internal problems of collective actions.

According to Alonso (2012), the term's development had three phases. At first, the "repertoires of collective action" described a limited set of political action strategies that were available for the social actors in a determined historical period - such as strikes, manifestations, and petitions. This idea takes into account the existence of "shared patterns of collective action," whose emergence and

development are closely linked to broader social and historical changes, such as urbanization, industrialization, formation of nation-states, etc. (Alonso, 2012, p. 24). Later on, as a response to the critics that pointed out the excessively structural nature of the concept, Tilly reformulated the idea, now denominated as "contentious repertoire. It now highlighted the actor's agency in contentious scenarios, as they choose and adapt the "routines" of the repertoire based on the circumstances and the reactions of their opponents (Alonso, 2012, p. 25).

Lastly, from the 2000s onwards, Tilly incorporates the idea of "performance" into the concept of repertoire, hoping to include the significance dimension and the individual interpretation into the investigative agenda on the dynamics of collective action (Alonso, 2012, p. 29). Repertoires became known as a set of "performances" that, although based on preexisting *scripts*, are always singular and marked by the actor's ability to improvise. Thus, the concept of "repertoires of collective action" highlights the complex relations that exist between sociocultural contexts, which both limit and facilitate certain types of action, and the social actors' capability of choosing and adapting – movements that both conform to and challenge those structures in each contentious scenario. In a review of the concepts of repertoires, performances, and tactics, Pereira e Silva (2020) demonstrate how scholars from the PPT and other analytical theories have tried to build approaches that recognize the influence of historical and structural factors on shaping the available forms of collective action while still highlighting the fundamental roles played by meanings, emotions, identities, and adaptation and creativity capabilities – that is, without sidelining the collective action's "internal dimension".

2.3 The New Social Movements Theory (NSMT)

The critiques that prompted the "relational spin" in the works of PPT authors came partially from the reflexive discussion promoted by the New Social Movements Theory (NSMT). Emerged in 1980, this approach constituted itself from the observation of collective protests and manifestations that flooded the streets in this period. The so-called new social conflicts had the fact that "the set of an individual's positions (as their place of residency, institutional apparatuses, and different forms of cultural, racial and sexual subordination) became a point of conflict and political mobilization" (Laclau, 1986, p. 43) as their fundamental feature.

Thus, the NSMT theorists argue that, generally, such conflicts demonstrate a shift from the political conflicts from the institutional sphere to certain "cultural areas", impacting elements such as "the personal identity, the time and space of daily life, the motivation and cultural patterns of individual actions" (Melucci, 1989, p. 58). The social diagnosis shared by the scholars states that "class conflicts don't represent the instruments of historical changes anymore" (Touraine, 1989, p. 15), which means that politics ceases to be a restricted arena of social life, connected above all to the institutional environments, and becomes "a present dimension [...] throughout the whole social practice" (Laclau, 1986, p. 42), mainly in everyday life.

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For these reasons, the NSMT approach focuses its analytical efforts on the matters of identities, culture, social relations, the role of emotions in society, and on the search for recognition (Bennett; Segerberg, 2012, p. 750; Galvão, 2008, p. 4). From this perspective, social movements are understood as "systems of action that operate in a systemic field of possibilities and limits" (Melucci, 1989, p. 52). Militants associated with social movements are not categorized as rational actors that objectively and frequently calculate the costs and benefits of action, nor as individuals fundamentally propelled by significant changes in the structure of political opportunities. They are, instead, understood as actors who are strongly motivated by the "search for identity and solidarity, which are not measurable and cannot be calculated" (Melucci, 1989, p. 53). According to this approach, activists strive for symbolic and cultural projects that might guide social action in different ways and broaden the field of recognition for alternative and marginalized identities, indicating the need to build a "different way to designate the world" (Melucci, 1989, p. 62).

Therefore, by focusing on collective identity and the role of the symbolic dimension in collective actions, as well as acknowledging the integrative and relational processes involved in the emergence and sustainment of social movements, the NSMT aligns more closely with the internal space and dynamics of collective manifestations. Alongside the previously mentioned authors, it is evident that – despite significant differences – the classical theories of collective action provide valuable theoretical and methodological tools for investigating the inherent challenges of coordinating human action around a specific collective project. After briefly presenting an overview of the basic conceptual framework, I believe it is now possible to proceed with the paper's argument and introduce the theoretical complementarity, whose key aspects have the potential to analytically strengthen the research agenda outlined here.

3 Pragmatic Sociology

Pragmatic sociology originated in the 1980s as part of the "new sociologies" (Vandenberghe; Véran, 2016), situating itself within a set of emerging currents that view the social world fundamentally from the perspective of human agency and meanings mobilized by social actors in different situations (Dosse, 2018). This approach assumes the situation and the action present in its unfolding as the thing that "constitutes the basic material of its investigations" (Barthe *et al.*, 2016, p. 91), thus "pushing" the social theory pendulum from "structuralism and the domination critique towards pragmatism, phenomenology and the hermeneutic of interpretation" (Vandenberghe, 2010, p. 87).

In other words, this means that pragmatic sociology – represented mainly by the anthropology of science (Latour, Callon, etc.) and the sociology of action regimes, whose main exponents are Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (Barthe *et al.*, 2016, p. 86) – was constituted in opposition to the "critical sociology", especially regarding the Bourdieusian approach. According to the pragmatic authors, sociology's classical theories neglected the individual's consciousness, mainly regarding its forms of understanding and criticizing social reality and linked the explanatory elements of social processes and

phenomena to "deep causes that fall outside the consciousness" (Vandenberghe, 2010, p. 153). In this sense, the only social actor capable of consciously speaking about the true dynamics of social reality would be the investigator, the one working to "'uncover' invisible or unconscious aspects of social relations" (Nardacchione, 2017, p. 165).

On the other hand, pragmatic sociologists aim at implementing a symmetrization[8] between researchers and laity, since the competencies commonly associated with the scientific activity (critique, judgment, investigation, inkling, etc.) are not the scientist's monopoly – they are also shared and mobilized by other social actors in their everyday lives. So, the pragmatists "hope to overcome the opposition between agency and structure through a constructivist analysis of situated interactions" (Vandenberghe, 2010, p. 88). According to this conceptual framework, social reality isn't an opaque and inaccessible totality for most individuals, but an "entanglement of dynamic relations and associations" (Corrêa, 2014, p. 39) and a set of situations packed with "ruptures, bifurcations, innovations and uncertainty" (Corrêa; Dias, 2016, p. 70). In line with this argument, the "social" emerges as a problem, as the element to be explained, and not as the explanatory resource used by sociology to demystify the world (Corrêa, 2014).

For this reason, researchers associated with the approach cast a special light on the "critical moments" (Boltanski; Thévenot, 1999) – that is, on situations" of discontinuity in a routine of non-questioning about surrounding actions" (Werneck, 2014, p. 36), in which the engaged social actors begin to act under "a justification imperative" (Boltanski; Thévenot, 2020). In these moments, individuals resort to different *moral grammars* to support their stances and strengthen their arguments. Therefore, if "critique is a procedure through which one points out the lack of meaning in an action" (Werneck, 2014, p. 37), then actors involved in such everyday situations must draw on different vocabularies of motives (Mills, 2016) to legitimize their actions.

According to Daniel Cefaï (2009, p. 11), the theoretical developments of pragmatic sociology regarding the modeling, clarification, and systematization of the multiple aspects of social action allow for a "reformulation of a certain number of issues related to the sociology of collective mobilization". In this paper, I argue that these issues—whose developments can be reformulated through pragmatic sociology—fundamentally pertain to the internal problems of collective action, such as the member's critique of their organization, the debate on political projects and proposals, the management of resources like time and money, and so forth. According to Cefaï (2009, p. 17), this approach is very similar to the concept of *contentious politics* developed by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly since the everyday social life "doesn't stop configuring itself when faced by acts of resistance, protest [...], complaints and claims, or [...] examination, experimentation, cooperation and innovation". Nonetheless, although there are affinities between both approaches, "the social movements' sociology hasn't

[8] It is worth noting that on the pragmatic sociology field there is a discussion on the distinct degrees of symmetrization observed on the works of Latour and Callon (generalized symmetry) on the one hand, and, on the Boltanski and Thévenot (restrict symmetry) on the other. For a clearer introduction into this subject, see Dosse (2018, p. 156-160). For a deeper debate, see Guggenheim e Potthast (2012).

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been very welcoming" (Cefaï, 2009, p. 11) to the theoretical and methodological contributions provided by the pragmatic sociology field.

In agreement with the brief overview presented so far, researchers aligned with this approach understand the dynamics of collective action as "a process of co-definition and co-domain of problematic situations" (Cefaï, 2009, p. 16). This means that social movements represent "a mobile framework of contexts of meaning" (Cefaï, 2009, p. 28) that, in addition to comprising "complex forms of cooperation, division of labor, technologies, rules and regulations" (Lorino, 2018, p. 140), are also constituted by multiple and variable agency dynamics that are related not only to people but also to "objects, tools, speeches, rituals and symbols" (Cefaï, 2009, p. 22). Consequently, a pragmatic sociologist's role in the context of collective action is to "follow the actors as closely as possible during their interpretative work" (Boltanski, 2016, p. 146) to clarify and describe "the reflexive and cognitive competencies" (Corrêa; Dias, 2016, p. 70) mobilized by them.

4 Possible Intersections between Pragmatic Sociology and the Classical Theories of Collective Action

Following Cefaï's argument (2009), I believe that pragmatic sociology's theoretical developments hold the potential to strengthen the analytical framework of the studies on collective action. I highlight that the reasons for this affirmation are due to four aspects. First, by opposing itself from the more structuralist approaches and previously defining what is "the social" (Corrêa, 2021), this theory endorses the importance of the dimension of human and non-human agency, stressing the critical and reflective capabilities mobilized by social actors when faced by the structural conditions in which their actions are embedded. Secondly, by adopting "critical moments" as the starting point of analysis on social life, pragmatic sociology allows the researcher to direct its analysis toward those moments in which collective actions face internal conflicts and critiques (Hutchinson, 1999; Ghaziani; Kretschmer, 2018), member's desertion (Fillieule, 2003; Sawicki; Siméant, 2011), disputes with other social movements, etc.

Thirdly, the emphasis on the *evaluative* dimension of social life brings the analysis closer to an investigation of the manners in which social actors mobilize their sense of justice for both "external" and "internal" collective action problems. Lastly, by shedding light on the *devices*[9], elements that enable the "anchoring" of moral values and logic in concrete life, pragmatic sociology suggests the investigation of how non-human elements (such as apps, tasks management systems, schedules, meeting minutes, sheets, etc.) are present in collective actions. How can these aspects relate to the basic inquiries of the previously presented classical theories?

[9] Although they do not only represent material or concrete things – the "accounts" (Scott; Lyman, 2008) are good examples of "linguistic devices" (Werneck, 2013) that are mobilized by social actors in order to account for their actions (Araujo, 2022) – in this paper's discussion, devices fundamentally constitute *objects*.

Firstly, the analytical processes developed by pragmatists can contribute to the recasting of a few fundamental insights from the Resource Mobilization Theory. As mentioned, RMT has moved the concept of collective action from the set of "irrational mobilizations", significantly influenced by emotional elements, to the field of rationalized practices developed by social actors. If, on the one hand, this shift has contributed to establishing a certain "epistemological dignity" for collective action as a research object, on the other hand, it has led to a complete takeover of the theme by the rational orientation of social actions. Therefore, social movements' members went from irrational individuals who would collectively react to certain "societal imbalances" to legitimate *homines economici* who constantly applied their engagement to the organization's possibilities of maximizing its particular interests.

Just as the other featured theories, RMT became significantly closer to the formulation of some of the internal problems of collective action, especially those related to the management of resources such as time and money. As previously stated, French pragmatic sociology emphasizes the evaluative dimension of social life, shaping a series of discussions on value and valuation (Porto; Werneck, 2021)—that is, reflections on how social actors ascribe value and contest the values (Stark, 2011) of actions, discourse, stances, social phenomena, everyday situations, and more. As these last paragraphs have shown, the observation of critical moments constitutes one of the main methodological tools for accessing not only the values that guide people's actions but also the devices they mobilize to materialize the abstract forms underlying their behavior.

Because of the pragmatic sociology's attention over the "devices [...] and operational circuits" (Cefaï, 2009, p. 22) that actors mobilize in different situations, I believe that the approach can serve as a fruitful path for investigating the issue of managing collective action's resources in a way that differs from the rationalist view that greatly underlies the resource mobilization theory. By simultaneously harnessing insights from the RMT and the critical legacy of the PPT and NSMT, the pragmatic sociology's proposition of following social actors' practices "as closely as possible" allows the researcher to analyze how these individuals operate and arrange the available resources in their mobilizations, as well as the *value criteria* they mobilize when elaborating organization tasks. In which ways is money *valued* inside a political organization? How are the decisions on where to direct this resource to are made? How are the availability and unavailability of certain members *organized* within a collective in the face of its goals? The potential conflicts that emerge from the circulation and direction of such resources within a collective organization (who manages the resources, how they are managed, where they are used, etc.) appear as important spaces for the development of insights regarding the internal dynamics of collective actions.

Secondly, pragmatic sociology also contributes to the increased complexity of certain central notions developed by the political process's theory. In the works of McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow one finds the formulation of a critical approach to social movements, which distances itself from the microeconomics influence on RMT. This approach seeks to closely examine the structures of

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constraint and political opportunities, which vary by national contexts and specific periods. Thereby, the political process theory provides the methodological and analytical tools that allow for the researcher to attentively assess the elements "external" to the collective action. Far for discarding this theory, I believe that the PPT's "macrostructural" reflections, the "micro-sociological" discussions posed by the pragmatic sociology approach carry an interesting potential for strengthening the proposed research agenda[10].

Researchers that follow this approach usually qualify the "micro" level of social reality as the terrain where "the 'macro' itself is materialized, realized, and objectified through practices, devices and institutions" (Barthe *et al.*, 2016, p. 88). As such, pragmatic sociologists try to reframe concepts such as "political opportunities structures" from the actors' point of view, guaranteeing that the terms are pertinent to the individual's experiences and contexts (Cefaï, 2009, p. 28). Consequently, the combination of pragmatic sociology and some of the most fundamental discussions brought about by the PPT, guided by the proposition of investigating the internal problems of collective actions, opens the door for an analysis of how social movements militants *value* and *provide meaning* to political and institutional changes and the context shifts in their everyday lives within collective organizations. In which way, the election or reelection of a candidate impacts the internal problems of collective actions? How does society's perception of specific debates (for example, over pension reforms) affect an organization's projects and political actions? By following this path, one would be able to examine how "macrostructural" matters are translated to the "ground" of collective actions. Besides that, the importance of the "interpretative frameworks" given by the PPT after its "relational spin" also deeply dialogues with the attention given by the pragmatic sociology over the engagement modalities (Thévenot, 2016) – that is, over the forms in which relations are established by actors between themselves and their environment[11].

Lastly, the theoretical developments provided by pragmatic sociologists allow for a deepening of the reflections on the insights formulated by the New Social Movements Theory. By emphasizing the symbolic dimension, "discursive arrays", and the role of affectivity[12] in acts of collective action, this approach's analytical tools align closely with the integrative and relational processes that operate within an organization's sociability space. Thus, regarding other connections, the links between the NSMT and pragmatic sociology appear as more "direct" associations. I understand

[10] With this, I do not intend to support the argument that associates pragmatic sociology *exclusively* to micro sociological studies. As it is possible to observe in various authors' research (Chateauraynaud, 2019; Freire, 2016; Mota, 2009), the approach dedicates itself not only to the investigation of reduced-scale situations, but also to broad, long-term and historical processes, as well as public issues.

[11] For a more detailed explanation and for the mobilization of the notion of regimes of engagement in an empirical research, see Mota (2009) and Ferreira (2023, 2024b, 2024c).

[12] Although it is not explored in this paper, the affectivity issue is not overlooked by the pragmatic sociology of collective action. As Cefaï (2009, p. 29) argues, "Affectivity is not a subject amongst others. It is what makes experiences possible, both perceptual and cognitive or moral. It is not a coloring of factual states or conscious states. Likewise, it is what guarantees our contact with others and with things, and what maintains united the situations that situate us in them. Collective actions are not all in the acting, but also in the suffering and sharing". For a more recent pragmatic investigation on the emotions' role in social life, see Talone (2023).

that the *ethnographic* direction often taken by pragmatic researchers to "describe the action and map the different positions taken by actors in situations of dispute and controversy" (Corrêa; Dias, 2016, p. 70) can enrich the understanding of social movements as "systems of action" (Melucci, 1989, p. 52).

According to this line of thought, pragmatic sociology also enables us to think about the political and contentious capillarization "throughout the whole social practice" (Laclau, 1986, p. 42), since it recognizes that "the borders of what is and isn't 'political' are constantly moved" (Cefaï, 2009, p. 7) by social actors' critical movements. By refusing to define the studied categories *a priori* – such as "justice" (Boltanski; Thévenot, 2020), "science" (Latour, 2011), and "reality" (Chateauraynaud, 2022) – to investigate how people mobilize them, the pragmatic approach also inaugurates the possibilities for a research agenda that is dedicated to the investigation on how social actors define what is "politics" and how they behave based on such definition (Werneck, 2021) in contexts of collective action, as within political parties and social movements.

Together with the proposition drafted here, we could also think about broadening this idea to encompass an analysis of the potentially existing relations between the different types of organizations and the shared understanding of what politics is. In what way do a collective group's strategies for managing matters such as money and members' time shape their definitions of "making politics"[13]? Are the various forms of internal organization and political definitions conflicting or convergent? At which moment do they converge and at which moment do they diverge? I believe that these can account for some of the initial and guiding inquiries of the proposed research agenda.

5 Final Considerations

In this paper, I have embarked on an attempt to theoretically tie up different approaches of the social theory field and collective action studies to support and strengthen a research agenda directed at the investigation of internal problems of collective action. Thus, this paper's main argument argues that although the classical theories on collective action already provide relevant analytical instruments for a critical investigation of the different dimensions of collective manifestations, the mobilization of the pragmatic sociology theoretical framework – together with the set of concepts from the MRT, PPT, and NSMT – holds the potential of enriching the analytical framework for developing the proposed research agenda and making it more consistent, plural and diversified. This is possible not by simply adding another theory to our "toolbox", but by the fact that pragmatic sociologists have been developing a series of theoretical and methodological instruments in the past decade, contributing to the increased complexity of social action studies and to the revaluation of the moral dimension and the devices that are situationally mobilized in everyday life.

[13] Apparently, issues like this have been debated in the exciting project Espaço Comum de Organizações (ECO), developed by the Instituto Alameda and by the Subconjunto de Prática Teórica. Further information on: https://www.espacocomum.org/.

I acknowledge that just like other theories, pragmatic sociology also has limitations for the proposition expressed here. As Celikates (2018) and Atkinson (2020) demonstrate, although it recognizes that agents exercise their reflective capabilities in specific social contexts, this approach doesn't deal substantially with the social conditions that can obstruct (or facilitate) the development and exercise of such capabilities. In the face of a social context where inequalities are deepened and the conditions of social reproduction are precarious in both the center and the peripheries of the capitalist system (Canettieri, 2020), how do political organizations with scarce financial resources have mobilized themselves (Paraná; Tupinambá, 2022; Ferreira, 2024a)? In which way does this context interfere with the organization's internal dimension and its militants' engagement? I believe that to properly work with issues like this, it would be necessary to theoretically complement more structuralist and institutionalist approaches with theories that value human and non-human agency.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the research agenda introduced in this paper could be supported by the carrying out of semi-structured interviews, as well as by the operationalization of participant observation - both methodological strategies that would certainly demand the investigators to immerse themselves in their chosen research object. It is not hard to imagine that this suggestion of investigating a collective action *from within* can raise a few dilemmas for research fulfillment. Confidentiality issues - i.e. the possibility of political organizations steadily working towards "saving" internal information - are an example of elements that set certain barriers to the analysis of these object's internal problems. Additionally, it is worth questioning the real possibilities that an "outsider" researcher could effectively *be part* of a social movement. Still, even with these potential obstacles, I hope that the theoretical reflections developed in this text can offer fruitful paths for those who decide to take upon the investigation of a collective action's *insides*. Therefore, the development of empirical studies about collective action, something I plan on engaging myself soon, plays a fundamental role in evaluating the pertinence of the suggested theoretical combinations.

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