



Analysis of the BLM movement towards social change

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Actors & Strategies for Change

Introduction

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a social movement co-founded by Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi on July 13, 2013. BLM is an international organization, working predominantly in the United States, that “focuses on combating anti-Black state- sanctioned violence and the oppression of all Black people” (Black Lives Matter, 2018). The deaths of black Americans Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown sparked the progression of BLM movement into the transnational spotlight. Through investigations, the U.S. Justice Department determined that the police and city courts in Ferguson, Missouri (where Brown was killed), regularly “engaged in a pattern and practice of discrimination against African Americans” (Gonzalez & Goodman, 2015). As a result, escalations were initiated by BLM supporters who demonstrated through both direct action, protests and rallies, and increased social media engagement. Hashtag activism, with the #Blacklivesmatter hashtag, was also used to spread awareness of the “implicit bias and anti-black racism and to protect and affirm the beauty and dignity of all Black lives” (Black Lives Matter, 2018). Black Lives Matter (2018) mission is to “build local power and to intervene when violence was inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes”. It is an inclusive social movement seeking change for all black people, no matter how they identify their gender, sexuality, socio-economic status or geographical location. With emergence of this movement, it has engaged a number of key actors and it is important to analyse levels of power, strategies, standpoints, motivations and how they each compare against chosen theories of change: the Amoeba of Cultural Change (Poyourow, 2010) and Four general strategies for affecting change in human systems (Transformational strategy) (Quinn, 2008).

Actors

There are multiple actors engaged in the debate of BLM, both for and against, with attitudes greatly varying (Menasce Horowitz & Livingston, 2016).

Colin Kaepernick, NFL quarterback

In 2016 Colin Kaepernick, NFL quarterback player for San Francisco 49ers in 2011, became a BLM figure by refusing to stand while the United States national anthem was being played before the start of NFL games. In support of the BLM movement and protest against anti-black police brutality, Kaepernick told NFL Media "I am not going to stand up to show

pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color” (Wyche, 2016). Although players are encouraged, but not required, to stand during the national anthem, Kaepernick met significant backlash and criticism for not doing so and was seen as disrespectful and unpatriotic. In response to this, he decided to kneel instead, out of respect for veterans who had given their lives. Kaepernick demonstrates what Massey (2016) discusses as social change through contention. He puts his reputation, career and thus income at risk by ‘giving voice’ to racial injustice. Despite resistance, giving voice to this social issue aids significantly in the emergence of social change. In 2018, Kaepernick was awarded Ambassador of Conscience award by Amnesty International for his efforts and donations to organisations of \$1 million (Gregory, 2018: Phillips, 2018).

Donald Trump

Some of the backlash Kaepernick and BLM received was given by Donald Trump, the 45th and current President of The United States of America. Trump sent out numerous tweets, stating that NFL players should be either fired or suspended if they disrespect the nation like that (Chaitin, 2017). However, further NFL teams and players stood together in protest of Trump's statements and supported Kaepernick. They knelt, locked arms, or stayed in the changing room until the anthem was over. Chaitin (2017) contends that Trump’s comments also initiated further support of an additional hashtag #takeaknee.

All Lives Matter Supporter

The All Lives Matter (ALM) movement was also generated in response to the BLM movement. ALM believe that all are created equal and everyone matters just as much as each-other. They are critical of BLM because they don’t speak for all minorities and generalise the police as they believe the police generalise them. However, Klein Perez (2017) believes that “‘All Lives Matter’ perpetuates racism by refusing to allow Black people to express their unique experiences of suffering without diluting it with that of other minorities”. Additionally, Scott (2015) defends that “those who are experiencing the pain and trauma of the black experience in this country don't want their rallying cry to be watered down with a generic feel-good catchphrase”. On the other hand, Mac Donald (2016) controversially warns about the “current frenzy against the police. What I do know is that we are playing with fire, and if it keeps spreading, it will be hard to put out.”

Michelle Alexander, Author and Civil Rights advocate

Alexander has joined the 'struggle' to support the BLM movement and believes that the current political status "it is just a continuation biased and prejudice laws which are redesigned in a new form" (Gonzalez & Goodman, 2015). In this interview with Democracy Now (Gonzalez & Goodman, 2015), Alexander further explains that "if we don't stand up, speak unpopular truths, take to the streets and organize, things aren't going to change. But, you know, what we see now is that we do have the power to make things change. And the question is: Are we going to transition from protest politics to long-term, strategic movement building?"

Delrish Moss, Sheriff of the town of Ferguson

Moss is an African American Sheriff of police who is motivated by his own experiences growing up in community with racial unrest to improve the way people of colour are treated by police (CNN, F.K. & J.B. 2016). Also a member of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (CNN, M.P., 2016.), Moss is committed to create awareness and discussions to improve the wellbeing for coloured people in Ferguson. In support of the BLM movement, Moss (2018) explains "Only when we learn to listen to various points of view do we grow. Sometimes that debate and growth is uncomfortable and even painful... but it is a part of the necessary evolution of the human condition... we all have the power to create change."

Analysis

Given the momentum that the BLM movement as a public phenomenon has taken on since the widespread media attention that it enjoyed, first through the actions of Caepernick, but then also the polemic reaction by current U.S president Trump and the diverse array of other actors involved, it is worthwhile to analyze the dynamics of the relations between

different key-actors. Using a systems perspective, with the United States as the uppermost meta-level for our analysis, we will now look at several key factors involved.

Levels of power

It seems rather obvious to start with stating the presidential power, with its clearly anti-BLM position, to be most powerful actor on the stage and thus constituting a major hurdle for the BLM movement. But how does such a view line up with an integral systems perspective? Granted, the president has close ties to the judiciary and legislative powers and to law-enforcement, but is also separated from those. This is a famous aspect of western political system which keep the center of executive power checked by concentric circles of effective regulatory bodies. In a democratic system a free press is also commonly referred to as a the third powerful influence on the state. Taking into account these ‘checks’ on the power of the president, on the other end of the spectrum the Black Lives Matters movement as a civil society initiative is also a systemic power to be reckoned with. With the ability to shift a nation's stance on the issue when working in cooperation with the media, they are an important key actor, with outer boundaries difficult to define. An example suggestive of how this power can be manifested, involving public figure Beyonce, is discussed in the next part of this paper. As shortly discussed above, actors such as human rights activist Alexander and Sheriff Moss are also important public figures that can contribute importantly to sparking nationwide social change. Largely these two groups then, the presidential power on the one hand and the civil rights movement of BLM seem to constitute the two most important levels of power in this case. In between the two we could arguably understand the general masses to be placed who haven't yet taken a stance on the issue, them being the largest loosely homogenous group involved in the public debate, they potentially have the power to swing it in either direction.

Underlying Motivations & Standpoints

Trump has stated before that he does not agree with the movement, he thinks the people inside BLM are too aggressive and are only looking for trouble. It is understandable given his position that he could not completely disagree with the police and let people go on with the hatred expressed towards the policeman. "I think they're trouble. I think they're looking for trouble," the Republican presidential candidate said during a Fox News interview with Bill

O'Reilly (THR Staff, 2015). "I looked at a couple of the people that were interviewed from the group," he said. "I saw them with hate coming down the street last week talking about cops and police, and what should be done to them. And that was not good. And I think it's a disgrace that they're getting away with it" (2015). For trump, patriotic values are more important. To respect the servants of the public law enforcement. To use the national anthem as a place to start a protest doesn't seem acceptable to him. Furthermore Trump said: 'It's 'All Lives Matter,' and that should be the theme of this country, frankly, or one of the themes.'"(Campbell 2015).

A person rooting for all live matter is in favor of that all human beings should be treated equally (Richard Sherman and Sen. Tim Scott). In opposition to BLM, ALM is a movement that wants to include everyone, while this seems like the most equal option, BLM is about changing the environment that the black community lives in and the treatment they receive from the police. Sheriff Delrish Moss is one of the supporters of BLM from inside the police, he is one of the key actors because he can change the public opinion about the police. He believes that the police should be included in the community and the people should feel represented and protected by them. *"The BLM movement like many other movements have created discussion, debate, and awareness. [...] I think we all have a story that needs to be heard and we all have the power to create change. History will judge our actions, we have to move on our convictions, but we have to be willing to consider all sides. Discomfort creates change but we have to trust the future for our answers."* - Moss (2015).

Theories of Change

In this section, we analyse the Black Lives Matter movement through the lenses of Alan AtKisson's *Amoeba of Cultural Change* (Poyourow, 2010) theory and Robert E. Quinn's theory of transforming or self transcendence cited in *Four General Strategies for Changing Human Systems* (Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008). Both theories of change are systems thinking-based strategies to understand how social movements and change occur in their socio-cultural contexts. While AtKisson's theory describes the formula of a movement, Quinn's theory defines what he calls transformational change as a result of his critique of the shortcomings in other self-interested change theories.

The Amoeba social movement

In AtKisson's model of change he uses a descriptive metaphor comparing human societies to an amoeba. The amoeba is a single-celled organism that senses food and stretches out to catch it, taking the entire organism with it in that direction (Atkisson 1999, cited in Poyourow 2010). Here society is the amoeba that changes in the direction of nourishing social change. In order to spark this movement, an inventor comes up with a radical idea that is convincing to a change agent who then translates and spreads the idea to average people. Among these people is a transformer, or influential leader in the community who effectively reaches and convinces the wider community of this idea. At this point, the inventor's initial idea has been shaped to the community's understanding and demands, and the movement has begun. Other noted stakeholders in this model are reactionaries, who maintain the status quo because they are invested in their position and therefore resist change, laggards, whom are passive members of the community that later join the movement as it grows and last iconoclasts, or people that join for their own reasons (Atkisson 1999, cited in Poyourow 2010).

This theory clearly addresses the actors involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. The amoeba can be seen as the movement itself, demanding reforms in the criminal justice and policing systems, which would effectively change the direction of society from its current state (Alexander, 2010). The inventor(s) of this movement are the group of founders and organisers who came up with the demands and strategies, they are Patrisse Khan Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi (Black Lives Matter, Union Labor). The change agents are all of the organisers and their partners working in different chapters of the country to spread the change through strategic means in respective communities (Black Lives Matter, Union Labor). Transformers include famous celebrities and politicians who have publicly supported the movement, for example Beyonce who attributed her Super Bowl performance to the movement (CNN, 2017). At this point, the movement reached the entertainment industry and plausibly the mainstream, as Beyonce is an influential pop artist. Furthermore, reactionaries include the blue lives movement supporters, republican party and most offensive, Donald Trump who vehemently rebuts the BLM movement and denies police brutality in the US due to their political platform.

As previously mentioned, the amoeba change theory takes the side of the movement, so any opportunity for growth of the movement can be seen as positive change at the same time any resistance to the movement is considered negative or challenging. By using this model,

one can identify both opportunities and challenges to growing the movement. Some opportunities include incorporating more transformers, such as Beyonce, whom can escalate the cause in both vertical and horizontal directions. She is a celebrity with social capital that translates to power due to her social position in society that could be used to pressure policy which creates vertical pressure on policy makers. She is also a powerful leader who's opinion influences her masses of fans, creating horizontal power by gaining change in the masses of laggards. By identifying more potential transformers like Beyonce, positive change can continue to happen.

On the other side, there are some iconoclasts whom instead of working positively, impose a hindrance to the movements growth. One iconoclast is the blue lives matter movement, who have taken the side of the police who also have lost lives. Another negative iconoclast is the all lives matter supporters, who have hijacked the terminology of the movement, and instead emphasised that not just black but *all* lives matter, effectively spreading a colorblind ideology that everyone is treated equal, when in reality black lives are treated worse. By AtKissons definition, these are people who have clearly “latched onto an idea and cling to it for reasons entirely their own” (Poyourow, 2010).

Transformational Change

In Quinn's transforming strategy, he first outlines less effective means of change, that assume people act based on their self interest, if a powerful superior enforces change, or if a person collaborates with an expert to reflect on their own experiences in order to undergo a change to better themselves (Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008). Quinn attests that such strategies usually fail in the long term because people will revert to their own ways if left unmonitored or change managers abuse their power so that change benefits themselves (2008). He leaves these theories based on short-term self-interest and introduces long-term transformational change as a strategy observed in great leaders such as Gandhi, MLK and Jesus (Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008). The theory first assumes that all systems must change with the outside environment to gain energy and if they do not change and seek a stable state instead, as he claims most people do, then the system will lose energy and die off (2008). Second, all people work two-fold, on the one hand holding high values and on the other practicing deviant behaviours, and usually can only commit to changes if their self interests align with that change. Nonetheless Quinn insists that all people have the potential to be leaders of

change and just usually lack moral power (some kind of internal confidence that can be expressed as power). Effective leaders of change however criticise their own incongruence and work to pursue higher values, by closing the gap between their two-fold nature. When this state of leadership is reached, a kind of “positive deviation” occurs where leaders act on their higher values and the previous short-term transitional, self interested system is dismantled (2008). In the process, people are inspired and join the leader to make new relationships and organization, and a social movement is born.

In terms of BLM, the status quo is the state of police shootings that has been a part of American history since the pre-civil rights era. Much like MLK, who Quinn uses as an example of a transformational agent of change, the leaders of the BLM are also suppressing their self-interested needs in order to push a more righteous agenda. The self-interest of people of colour is to follow the status quo so that they can continue to survive in the day-to-day, i.e. going to work, abiding by the unsaid racist system, and working to further his or herself within the confines of the system. Instead, participants of the BLM movement put those things at risk because they realise that demanding a better justice and incarceration system is more important and align more with their higher values. In turn, their day-to-day practices begin to align with their higher values because of constant participation in the movement. Although the inner workings of the movement are difficult to analyze, some evidence of this claim is lifetime of this movement. Since 2012 with the death of Trayvon Martin, BLM has gained speed and support throughout the country. This effort demands commitment, motivation and resources from its founders and organizers, who today are employed by the movement itself (Black Lives Matter, Union Labor).

Because participants of the movement undergo a self-transformation, which according to Quinn increases the health and wellness of both the individuals and the community, a kind of normative power is occurring here. Normative power is the power to compel people to act based on intrinsic rewards, which in this case are higher values and contributing to the fight for a better society (Lunenburg, 2012). In the context of BLM, this power gain creates an opportunity for the movement to influence policy and policing practices. It can also create a hindrance, because as the movement has gained more attention in media and politics, it has also gained stronger opponents. One of which who attacks at an unprecedented caliber is President Donald Trump (as explained in other sections of this paper).

Conclusion

Best Case Scenario

The best case scenario would have to involve all of the people in this case.

The first actor to consider would be Donald Trump, he has the most power in this list of actors. As we have mentioned before, his standpoint is quite clear, he is not in favour of the movement, so we will just assume that he changes his opinion and supports the movement. In this case then he could make a change in the opinion of society and his supporters.

Then he could start to work with the main actors like Sheriff Delrish Moss in order to adopt some of the changes presented in Campaign Zero, a comprehensive policy proposal by the BLM activists (G. Lopez, 2015). In the best case scenario some of the proposals by project zero are taken into account and implemented by the police, including the military disarmament of the police forces, this would imply that the economical profit of the private military companies are no longer a priority when taking a decision.

The people in the BLM movement would stop complaining about the failure in the system and instead work together with the government and the police force in order to create a new system of order. In the best case scenario, the public opinion of the police forces would change dramatically. If the proposal in “campaign zero” regarding the testing of mental health status of all of the police forces is approved, then the number of policeman with a violent tendency would be reduced. One of the reasons of why the level of injustice and violence in the streets are so high, is because of the lack of education, this is why the main solution to the problem is to create a new educational system that could interest the youth and lead them to make better decisions for themselves and their future. A key role in this movement is the media, in the best case scenario the media becomes unbiased in their approach to the problem, supports the new changes being applied by the government and thus helps society progress and the advancement of the accepted proposals in campaign zero. The “All live matter” is seen as it is, a good proposal in order to further advance the laws and make them just for everyone. The educational, police and crime related changes involve all of society, this is why everyone gets a better treatment out of these changes. All of the athletes that were involved with BLM made a big change in the opinion and the awareness of the movement. Their effort and risk are well taken by the community and shown as an example of courage and standing for what you believe.

Worst case scenario

While hypothesizing how a worst case scenario ‘could’ develop, it is worth taking stock of where we are at today as seen through the lens of some of the toughest academic activism being done right now. Alexander (2010:38) relates that on June 12, 1963, President Kennedy had promised that he would engage the Congress to adopt a just Civil Rights bill. This statement made him to be referred to as pro-civil rights movement. Unfortunately, he was assassinated before he could fulfill his promise, nevertheless, his successor promised to take over from where the previous president had stopped. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made racial discrimination illegal. And the Voting Rights Act was also attained in 1965. However in 1968, Martin Luther the King was assassinated to suppress those who were opposed to Whites supremacy. Based on these tragic events, in the worst case, Alexander and other activists who are behind black lives matter could follow suit or be sent to prison for terrorism-related crimes.

Arguably we need not look so far into the future to paint a grim picture of where the racial inequality against which the BLM movement demonstrates is leading. Let’s continue taking stock of the situation already at hand. According to Michelle Alexander over 80% of black Americans have a criminal record, this acts as an excuse to deport them and deny them American citizenship. Therefore, this constitutes something like a new Jim Crow caste system, the mass incarceration of poor black Americans has *de facto* relegated them to being second class citizens. This undermines all the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement of 1964 as well as the Voting act of 1965. In fact, Alexander argues that the United States never did abolish Jim Crow, but just redesigned it (Alexander 2010:58-59). She further supports this contention by the fact that between 1985- 2000 approximately half a million people were in prison compared to 41100 in 1980, more than 31 million people have been arrested since the war on drugs began. Colored children had been picked up from the school and taken even to adult prisons. Those who have been convicts or who have criminal records are subjected to legal discrimination that is to say job discrimination, public housing discrimination, banned from getting educational aid, no longer eligible to vote for the leaders who make the laws which govern society, in this way, realizing worst case scenario. If Trump starts taking

coercive action towards the movement, activists could be portrayed as terrorists and be incarcerated. In the worst case, such a class war based on racist ideology may advance into genocide. It has happened before, as with what happened to the Native Americans who were slaughtered in a genocidal act discrimination. (Alexander 2010:60).

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