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978-0-521-48516-6 - Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings

Edited by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald

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Social movements are a prominent feature of the modern world and have attracted increasing attention from scholars in many countries. This volume brings together a set of essays that focus on political opportunities, mobilization structures and strategies, and cultural framing and ideologies. The essays are comparative and include studies of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the United States, Italy, the Netherlands, and West Germany. Their authors are leaders in the development of social movement theory and the empirical study of social movements.

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*Comparative perspectives
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*Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and
cultural framings*

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Preface

From the vantage point of 1995, it would be hard to convey to an outsider just how much the study of social movements has changed in the last ten years. Although the field grew apace with the political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, European and especially American scholars continued to work in relative ignorance of each other until well into the 1980s. Among the earliest vehicles facilitating contact between movement scholars from different countries were two conferences organized by Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow and held at Cornell University and the Free University in Amsterdam in the summers of 1985 and 1986, respectively. Stimulated by the contacts established at these two meetings, the cross-national discourse between movement scholars accelerated markedly over the next few years. Between 1986 and 1992 at least five other international gatherings of movement scholars took place. One of the most fruitful of these was held in Berlin in July 1990 under the sponsorship of the research unit on "social movements and the public" of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin. Under the direction of Friedhelm Neidhardt, this unit has functioned more generally as one of the central nodes in the rapidly expanding international network of movement scholars.

It was in the spirit of these international gatherings that we decided to organize the conference at which most of the essays included in this volume were first presented as papers. Under the title "Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes," the conference took place at the Life Cycle Research Institute at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., in August 1992. Moreover, since that gathering, at least four other international conferences of social movement scholars have taken place, including meetings in Amsterdam and Geneva in the summer of 1995. Finally, the many sessions organized by the Working Group on Collective Behavior and Social Movements at the Thirteenth World Congress of the International Sociological Association held in Bielefeld in July 1994 afforded movement scholars from many countries yet another opportunity to meet and exchange work.

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In short, the density of contact between European and American movement scholars is now so great as to make it difficult to speak of distinct American and European perspectives on social movements. The intellectual impact of this cross-fertilization has been dramatic and salutary. Two effects in particular should be noted: First, exposure to different perspectives has undercut the theoretical provincialism characteristic of most earlier work. Second, confronting cases drawn from a number of different national contexts has forced movement scholars to adopt a more comparative view of social movements. Both of these intellectual “gains” are reflected in the pieces included in this volume. To a greater or lesser extent, all of the chapters are comparative in their focus. And all of their authors speak an eclectic theoretical language born of an appreciation for the profusion of useful analytic tools that have developed from the clash of “competing” perspectives over the past ten years or so.

Rarely, in academe, does one have a chance to engage in a thorough and systematic review of empirical work and theory across a broad field of study. Our collaborative work on this volume has given us this opportunity. In particular, our decision to prepare comprehensive surveys introducing each of the three main sections of the volume required that we review the development of theory and research in regard to each of our three main concepts. Having done this, we are convinced that real progress has been made, that knowledge has indeed cumulated in the field. Anyone who doubts this assessment would do well to compare the works in the section on political opportunities – including the introduction – with the early “classic” treatments of the concept (e.g., Eisinger, 1973; McAdam, 1982; Tilly, 1978), which, by contrast, now seem highly preliminary. The same is true when one compares the classic works of Zald and Ash (1966) and McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) on social movement organization with the “state-of-the-art” contributions included here in the section on mobilizing structures. Perhaps only in the area of framing processes does current work – as reflected in this volume – seem only slightly more advanced than the earliest works in the area (Melucci, 1985; Snow et al., 1986). Much of this progress we attribute to the synergic effect of the expansion of cross-national discourse among movement scholars.

Still, we should not congratulate ourselves overmuch. The new comparative riches available to movement scholars are based, almost exclusively, on research rooted in core democracies and focused primarily on contemporary movements. Thus, the “international” community of movement scholars is a bit of a misnomer, dominated as it is by American and Western European scholars. If our understanding of collective action dynamics has benefited as much as we contend from comparing cases across this relatively homogeneous set of polities, imagine what we are likely to learn from broadening our perspective to include those set in very different times and places. Two

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distinct injunctions are implicit in this observation: First, we must seek to broaden the community of movement scholars to include those studying collective action in peripheral and semiperipheral countries and all manner of nondemocratic contexts. The chapter by Elena Zdravomyslova in this volume, comparing the development of two very different movements in Leningrad/St. Petersburg during the “protest cycle of perestroika,” speaks to the scholarly riches we can expect should we act on this injunction. Second, as movement scholars, we need to be more faithful to the role of history in shaping the context within which collective action takes place. Although interest in social movements and revolutions has greatly increased among historians and historically oriented social scientists over the past twenty years, the majority of political scientists and sociologists working in the area remain only dimly aware of the relevant historical scholarship. In our view, the field has suffered from this neglect. One need only read the contributions by Elisabeth Clemens and Kim Voss in this volume to appreciate the scholarly riches to be had from combining the methods and perspectives of history with the analytic tools developed by the narrower community of movement scholars reviewed here. The challenge, then, will be to consolidate the theoretical and empirical gains of this community while expanding it to incorporate scholars studying collective action in very different times and places.

Let us close this preface on a more prosaic note by acknowledging the myriad others who have contributed in some way to the production of this volume. Our first thanks go to the authors themselves. The volume is as much theirs as it is ours. Not only were they consistently inspired in their approach to the intellectual “assignments” we gave them; they were remarkably responsible in carrying them out. The typical nightmare associated with edited collections stems from the difficulties inherent in coordinating the activities of multiple authors. In this case, we were blessed to be working with scholars who somehow managed to do the impossible, that is, produce at least three drafts of their papers while conforming closely to the requirements of the demanding production schedule we established. We remain as amazed by this outcome as we are grateful.

The strength of the individual contributions is owed, in part, to the feedback the authors received at the 1992 Catholic University conference at which the pieces were first presented. Thanks are therefore due to all those who took part in the conference. In addition to our authors, they include David Allison, Dan Cress, John Crist, Bob Edwards, Craig Jenkins, Alberto Melucci, Kelly Moore, Friedhelm Neidhardt, Ron Pagnucco, Michele Pinkow, Gretchen Rodkey, Jennifer Sell, Jackie Smith, David Snow, and Suzanne Staggenborg.

The conference, in turn, would not have been possible without the financial support and administrative assistance of a number of people. The Office

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of International Research of the University of Michigan, the Department of Sociology of the University of Arizona, and the Life Cycle Research Institute at the Catholic University provided small grants to the organizers for planning and carrying out the conference. As well, the Goethe Institut of Washington, D.C., the German Academic Exchange Service, and the Center on Philanthropy of Indiana University provided invaluable financial support. We thank the principals of each of these supporting institutions.

Finally, we could not have organized the conference without the help of the staff at the Life Cycle Research Institute at the Catholic University. Dorothy Kane administered the budget, handled travel and housing arrangements, and kept things running smoothly throughout the conference. In this she was aided by Zita Kelly, who got stuck with the heavy copying assignments but never complained, as well as Martin Scanlan and Daniel McGrath. Words cannot adequately convey the gratitude this dedicated staff earned from us before, during, and after the conference.

In preparing the volume for submission to Cambridge University Press, we benefited enormously from the help of a number of people. Key, in this regard, was Barbara McIntosh, who not only typed several of the chapters but also spent long hours pulling together the integrated bibliography that follows the text. In addition, several articles were subjected to thorough English-language editing in advance of submission. Dan Madaj served as our copy editor at that stage.

Finally, we would be remiss if we failed to express our deep appreciation for the help we have received from all those associated with the project at Cambridge. Our greatest debts of gratitude in this regard go to the series editor, Peter Lange, who first expressed interest in the project, and to our editor at Cambridge, Alex Holzman, who executed his many responsibilities on the project with great skill and efficiency. But we also want to thank Tom Vanderbilt for his editorial assistance on the project, Cynthia Benn for a superb job of copy editing, and the two anonymous reviewers whose early feedback on the individual articles was consistently insightful and helpful by pointing out shortcomings that needed to be redressed in the subsequent revision.