

Book Review: The Future of Social Movement Research: Dynamics, Mechanisms, and Processes, edited by Jacquélien van Stekelenburg et al.

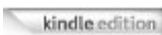
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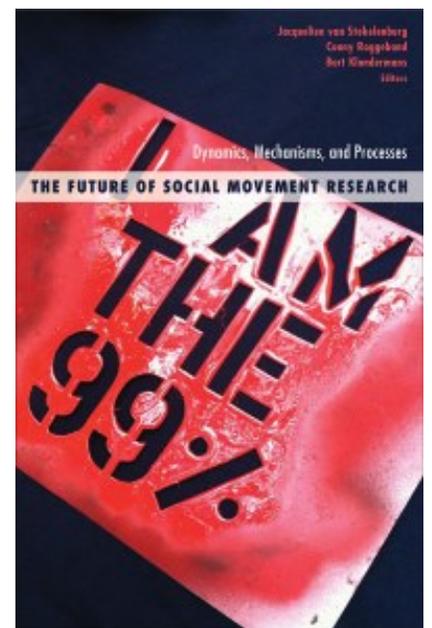
*Are the dynamics of contention changing? This is the question confronted by the contributors of this volume. The answers, arriving at a time of extraordinary worldwide turmoil, aim not only to provide a wide-ranging and varied understanding of how social movements arise and persist, but also engender unanswered questions, pointing to new theoretical strands and fields of research. **The Future of Social Movement Research** is an excellent account of the current position of sociological research in the larger scope of contemporary political change and protest movements, concludes **Alexei Anisin**.*



The Future of Social Movement Research: Dynamics, Mechanisms, and Processes. Jacquélien van Stekelenburg, Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans (eds.). University of Minnesota Press. July 2013.

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Globalization, along with the emerging liquidity of nation states and the increasing role of the internet in our lives are all factors that have led many academics to question whether traditional forms of social movements are still effective and whether a new type of political dissent has emerged. In [Jacquélien Van Stekelenburg](#) et al.'s new co-authored volume, *The Future of Social Movement Research*, the status and position of the discipline of Sociology is discussed, with chapters from admired scholars ranging from Sidney Tarrow to Bert Klandermans considering the question of whether the dynamics of political contention have changed in recent years. Across nineteen chapters, accounts of protests are provided with new insights given into possible future directions. By revisiting a few chapters from this important book, I will show that the discipline of Sociology in its study of social movements and contentious politics is taking the correct steps to further strengthen its explanatory power through the shift and motive to study the fundamental psychosocial processes and emotions behind political contention, mobilization and demand.



In the third chapter, “Social Movement Participation in the Global Society: Identity, Networks, and Emotions,” Verta Taylor emphasizes the importance of collective identity theory for the study of identity formation and grievance sharing in our contemporary world. The social psychological dynamics that underlie political contention are explained and are shown to have the power to present new insights into the contemporary form and effectiveness of Western social movements. Taylor presents the reader with the concept of a discursive community, in which the process of the politicization of identity functions through a network-based and multi-cultural form of democratic governance. This is a recent development, as Taylor argues the rising inter-connectedness of populations in our modern western world has resulted in new webs of links being created that can converge multiple identities. Taylor makes a strong claim that globalization and new “culturally diverse network societies” are changing the role of politics in the Western realm and that attention must be paid to meaning, emotions and networks given the importance of these factors for the diffusion of contemporary uprisings such as the Arab Spring.

The eighth chapter, “Organizational Fields and Social Movement Dynamics”, presents a typology of “modes of coordination” of collective action that can help overcome the shortfalls in understanding that have arisen from the tendency to “conflate an empiricist and an analytic view of social movements” throughout the social sciences. Essentially, Diani argues that the organizational aspects of social movements – such as variations in aggregate participants, number of protests, and network configurations – are often more important than the intentions of individual actors or groups themselves. Modes of coordination enable us to better understand how social movements emerge through the transformation of relational patterns, due to the fact that episodes of mass political contention are often highly organized and are based on civic networks. As an example, the South African Apartheid Black Consciousness movement of the 1960s contained a diverse network, headed by intellectual leaders that strategically embraced differing social demands into their movement. The study of social movements then can greatly benefit from the further theoretical intertwining of organizational theory and social movement dynamics given the ontological base of any type of political movement relies on an effective organizational strategy. By encouraging sociologists to pay more attention to organization, Diani provides a fruitful avenue for future research that may be of benefit to scholars and protestors alike.

Sociology heavyweights Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow bring up a significant point in their chapter “Social Movements and Elections: Toward a Broader Understanding of the Political Context of Contention”. Surprisingly, sociologists have paid very little attention to the political influence behind social movements. While political scientists have historically studied institutions, elections and the actions of individuals, sociologists conversely had developed a political process model decades ago that categorizes social movements through processes, repertoires and mechanisms (as an example of a study using political process theory see Doug McAdam’s *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*). This model relies on collective dynamics and networks and influences a significant portion of sociological research today. With this in mind, even the most powerful movements in history, such as the rise of the Nazi and Fascist Italian parties, had occurred through institutional means via elections. McAdam and Tarrow present empirical examples of social movement activity in the context of the United States, focusing on racial contention. Beginning with the period of Abraham Lincoln’s election in 1860, Southern secessionists staged mass protests in response to slavery reforms. During the Great Depression Roosevelt implemented the biggest social welfare reform in the history of the United States which also led to the birth of civil rights and the demobilization of the segregationists. The 1960s and 1970s were filled with great discontent, much of which was tied to electoral opinion. The rise of the Tea Party occurred after the election of Obama and also caused the Democratic Party to suffer one of its biggest mid-term election losses in U.S. history, politics greatly influence social movements.

The Future of Social Movement Research is an excellent account of the current position of sociological research in the larger scope of contemporary political change and protest movements. It gives readers an excellent overview of a discipline that has been at the forefront of explaining and describing social change for decades, and the contributions from each scholar present detailed overviews of what we already know, should know, and realistic directions one can take for future research. The Arab Spring, the recent Turkish and Brazilian uprisings among many others all contain social movements with distinctive features which relate to our modern era.

By acknowledging the changing of the dynamics of contention, this compilation correctly argues for various shifting of their disciplines’ theoretical focus onto both new and old avenues in order to account for such dramatic changes. Above all, the shift towards meaning, discourse and the psychological processes underlying protest behaviour give great potential for future scholarship. A must read for sociologists, social movement scholars and anyone interested in social change.

Alexei Anisin is a PhD student in the Department of Government at the University of Essex. His research focuses on the topic of nonviolent civil resistance and social transition through a discourse theoretic approach. In the past, Alexei has worked for tech start ups in Silicon Valley and is also a reviewer for the ESTRO (Essex University

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