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Klandermans, P.G.; Roggeband, Conny

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Disciplinary Approaches to Social Movements. Introduction to Second Expanded and Updated Edition

1

Conny Roggeband and Bert Klandermans

Abstract

When we published the first edition of this handbook a decade ago, we noted the rapid growth of scholarly interest in social movements and collective action in particular since the 1990s and the proliferation of social movement studies across the social scientific disciplines. In the decade that lies between the first and second edition of this handbook, the field of social movement studies was boosted by new important mobilizations across the globe that spurred research and led to an impressive number of recent publications.

When we published the first edition of this handbook a decade ago, we noted the rapid growth of scholarly interest in social movements and collective action in particular since the 1990s and the proliferation of social movement studies across the social scientific disciplines. In the decade that lies between the first and second edition of this handbook, the field of social movement studies was boosted by new important mobilizations across the globe that spurred research and led to an impres-

sive number of recent publications.¹ These draw our attention to contemporary trends of globalization and digitalization of protest and cyberactivism. Also, current research provides fresh perspectives on older or enduring features of collective action such as networking, the role of art and performance in protest, or the use of rights and legal action by social movement activists. The ongoing nature of protests and movements constantly raises new research themes and questions and presents new theoretical challenges that require creative thinking, borrowing and combining concepts and tools from of the different social scientific disciplines.

This second edition therefore covers a wider range of disciplines that bring important insights, concepts and theoretical tools with them, making social movement a field of distinctive theoretical

C. Roggeband (✉)
Department of Political Science, University
of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: c.m.roggeband@uva.nl

B. Klandermans
Department of Sociology, VU-University
Department of Sociology, Amsterdam,
The Netherlands
e-mail: p.g.klandermans@vu.nl

¹Google scholar gives 168,000 hits for publications on social movements between 2007 and 2017.

pluralism (Della Porta 2016). New developments in fields like communication sciences, organization studies or law lead to a further diversification of social movement studies, while the field also continues to expand within sociology and political science where it principally developed (Scalmers 2015). Sociology remains the theoretical “home front” of social movement studies, but spillover effects and trading with other disciplines are central to the development of the field. As a result, social movements studies in social psychology, anthropology, organization or communication studies are no longer mere auxiliary sciences to sociology, but have increasingly developed as distinctive subfields. The emergence of social movement scholarship in a wider scope of disciplines brings in a large set of new theoretical and conceptual tools to the debate that help us understand and analyze current protest. This underlines the importance of this project in mapping specific theories and insights to study social movements that emerge across disciplines, while at the same time keeping a close eye on the specific disciplinary assumptions, methods and limits that these hold. The clarification of these differences is a necessary requisite for crossing boundaries, stimulating dialogue and developing interdisciplinary approaches and research. This exercise is all the more critical seen the further diversification of the field. While the expansion of the field potentially brings in new theoretical insights and methodological innovation, it may also have more troublesome implications. The establishment of social movement studies as field within different disciplines also leads to specific approaches and standards of explanations that complicate dialogue, cross-fertilization and learning. Disciplinary boundaries often limit knowledge transfer and therefore result in a segmentation that hinders cross-fertilization or synthesis. Too often, scholars make similar arguments but talk past each other because they belong to different disciplines, quote different bodies of literature and use a different vocabulary. It is therefore important to identify overlap and topics of shared interest, but also to explore how shared concepts may be informed by

different premises. The updated and new contributions to this handbook make an important effort in mapping these disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches and in explaining and illustrating how these specific theoretical tools and concepts serve to understand contemporary contentious action and protest.

Expansion Across Disciplines and Further Specialization

A quick search in Google Scholar learns us that social movement studies over the last two decades has become flourishing area of scholarship across the social sciences (Table 1.1).

The increase in publications indicates that social movement studies is developing as a distinctive subfield in most of the social sciences. Social movement scholars working from these disciplines often combine social movement theory as developed within sociology and political science with a range of theories and concepts from their own disciplines. The recognition of sociology as founding discipline explains why scholars from other disciplines are familiar with and often make use of sociological concepts and theories, but that the reverse is still less common.

The book chapters discuss the development of specific disciplinary approaches to social movements. We asked the authors of the chapters to describe the core focus of the discipline, to identify the distinctive topics and questions that are raised and the concepts and methodological tools used. In addition, we asked for a short overview of the development of the field, and to review key studies. The chapters also discuss the current research agenda, gaps and unanswered questions. This sample demonstrates that further disciplinary specializations allow social movement scholars to forward more precise analyses and interpretations.

Deana Rohlinger and Haley Gentile (Chap. 2) review how sociologists have studied the emergence of social movements and participation in collective action. They outline the earlier more “structural” approaches that developed within sociology like resource mobilization theory and

Table 1.1 Number of publications on social movements in the different disciplines (1975–2015)^a

	1975–84	85–94	95–2004	2005–2015
Sociology	6610	11,700	35,800	56,200
Political science	2000	5410	18,900	29,700
Anthropology	1620	4120	14,900	24,900
History	2650	8111	16,800	17,700
Social psychology	1210	1940	5850	16,900
Organization studies	50	133	719	5150
Law/legal scholarship	77	451	1690	5480
Communication sciences	5	26	131	864

^aWe used Google Scholar to search for combinations of social movements and the different disciplines. This is arguably a rather imprecise instrument for a number of reasons. First, the presence of the search word does not simply indicate that the publication is indeed using a distinctive disciplinary lens. Also, for some disciplines it is more difficult to decide which search key words to use than for others. This is the case for history or law. For law we decided to add historians and for law legal scholars

political process theory and had important spillover effects to other disciplines, Next, they discuss the more recent “cultural turn” that brought attention to issues like framing and frames, emotion, and collective identity. This cultural turn according to Rohlinger and Gentile brings important conceptual advancements like a more relational approach that allows for dynamic multi-level analyses of participation. Also, it draws attention to the mobilizing role of affects and emotions in collective action. These innovations bring with them methodological challenges like how to quantify individual feelings or analytically separating overlapping and mutually reinforcing processes of framing and identification. Assessing the current state of the field in the US and Europe, Rohlinger and Gentile point to two important current issues. The first is the role of mass media and new social media, an area with important overlaps with communication science. Sociologists pay particular attention to how social movement organizations build their legitimacy with media outlets or use different media, and the role of media in the spread of movement ideas. The second issue is the somewhat understudied issue of movement strategy that benefits from newer more relational approaches that help explain why movement activist make choices that do not seem beneficial to them.

Kateřina Vráblíková (Chap. 3) notes that contentious politics remained a rather marginal topic in political science compared to sociology. In her chapter she maps the current attention to social movements in the discipline by analyzing the abstracts of the two major political science conferences in the United States (APSA) and Europe (ECPR). This makes clear that overall, political scientists demonstrate a remarkably low interest in social movements and protest. Most attention to protest and social movements is paid by scholar working on political violence. Her analysis reveals what are the key topics and puzzles, theoretical and analytical approaches, and methods and data that dominate present day political science scholarship on movements and protest. Vráblíková points out that despite the very similar and partly overlapping objects of study, literature about interest groups, civil society and political participation do not usually refer to studies and concepts from social movements and vice versa. According to Vráblíková the field of social movement studies would benefit from more cross fertilization between political science and sociological approaches to social movements. She argues that linking the methodological diversity and flexibility of social movement literature with the political science focus on individual-level surveys would yield important new insights. Also, it would broaden

the scope of the social movements field by integrating other contentious act and actors beyond social movements.

Ton Salman and Willem Assies (Chap. 4) introduce the reader to the various ways in which anthropology contributes to the study of social movements. With its focus on the role of culture and meaning making in protest and collective action, anthropology gives important insights in how cultural features emerge as assets, constraints and learning instances in social movements. This emphasis on cultural dimensions, Salman and Assies argue, helps to clarify the recurrent debate between more structuralist and more agency-focused approaches of social movements. The authors also discuss ethnography as a distinctive methodological contribution of anthropology to social movement studies. Salman and Assies argue that this method is key to face the current challenges of analysing the perceptions and motivations of participants with regard to movement goals and strategies. A focus on the attitudes and actions of participants helps to understand social movements as polyvalent, multi-layered phenomena, and provides better insight in their success and failure.

Jacqueline Van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans (Chap. 5) outline the specific approach of social psychology to social movements and protests. They argue that the social psychology of protest has developed into rich field of scholarship that has become more rooted in state of the art social psychology. Social psychology focuses on the basic question of why some individuals participate in social movements while others do not, or why some individuals decide to quit while others stay involved. Social psychologists explain why individuals identify with a group, and why strong group identification reinforces someone's willingness to take part in protest on behalf of that group. Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans elaborate on four basic social psychological mechanisms—social identity, cognition, emotion and motivation—that mediate between collective identity and collective action. They indicate that the emphasis in social psychology so far has been on the antecedents of protest participation, whereas the social

psychological consequences of protest are still understudied. Sustained participation, despite its importance for the longer term success for social movements, is absent in the literature. Disengagement, Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans argue, is related to the decline in gratification and commitment.

Brian Dill and Ron Aminzade (Chap. 6) reflect on the distinctive ways in which historians have contributed to our understanding of social movements and collective action. They contend that historians explain protest or collective action by constructing a plausible and persuasive narrative about the sequence of events leading up to it or the motives that impelled it, rather than linking it to institutional or other contextual factors. To study social movements, historians do not generate their own data but rely on existing historic sources which require interpretation. Another distinctive feature is the focus on long term processes of change and attention to the temporal boundaries demarcating different historical periods. By providing detailed historic descriptions of processes of change, scholars augment the historical record with respect to established events, legitimating their particular contribution to the literature by showing how it fills a gap or omission. Historians often offer corrective interpretations of historical movements or protest that challenges the official or established view of an event. Dill and Aminzade argue that historical research with its close attention to detail that comes from grounding research in a particular temporal and spatial context serves to improve the explanatory power of social science theories.

Jonathan Cable (Chap. 7) explores the study of social movements in the communication sciences. He outlines four central themes of protest research. A first line of research deals with media representation of social movements and the factors that impact on how media report on protest and collective action. Cable shows that media coverage has a general focus on the tactical approach of social movements in particular when spectacular or novel tactics are used. Next, he reviews research on the methods used by activists to communicate their messages

and/or applying political pressure and how digital media has increased social movements' ability to challenge dominant media narratives and correct inaccuracies. A third and important new line of research deals with the incorporation of digital technology into the tactical repertoires of protest groups and the impacts this has. Finally, Cables discusses the repression of social movements and the particular role that digital media plays in this.

Frank de Bakker, Frank den Hond and Mikko Laamanen (Chap. 8) review both the contribution of organization studies to the study of social movements and the place of social movement research within organizational studies. Over the past two decades an important new field of scholarship developed that focuses on the interactions between social movements and economic authorities, such as corporations, industries and markets. Movements have successfully targeted companies to become more socially responsible in a number of domains. In targeting private companies social movements had to reinvent their tactical repertoire. Activists often use regulatory and legislative systems to challenge economic institutions, but increasingly also directly engage with firms not only to challenge them but also to collaborate. An important line of research has developed to examine the responses of economic actors to social movements and how economic hegemonies counteract such challenges. Next, the authors point to important new venues in organizational scholarship that are relevant to the general field of social movement studies as well those interested in protest against companies. The interest to non-traditional forms of organization redirects the focus from social movement organizations to processes of organizing. De Bakker, Den Hond and Laamanen argue that new insights on 'partial organizing' in organizations studies are particularly useful to understand the new networked and hybrid organizational forms of contemporary movements.

Scott Cummings (Chap. 9) discusses the exchange between law and social science over the past two decades that has led to the emergence of "law and social movements" as a

distinctive scholarly field. Scholars in this field examine the role of social movements in democratic politics and in particular the role of law and lawyers in social movement mobilization. While social scientists mainly focus on the role of legal mobilization to advance social movement goals and gain leverage, legal scholars have incorporated social movements into legal theory as instruments of legal reform and reflect on the role of law as a tool of progressive social change. The chapter traces the parallel development of legal mobilization within social movement theory and law. Cummings argues that legal scholars and social movement scholars each respond to different problems in law and sociology. Legal scholars have used social movements to present a model of progressive legal reform that promises to reclaim the transformative potential of law while preserving traditional roles for courts and lawyers. Social movement scholars, principally sociologists, instead, focus on the link between movements and institutional politics and the role of legal activism while emphasizing the role of social movement as outsiders.

While each of these contributions aims to map the specificities of the distinctive disciplinary approaches to social movements and protest, there is considerable overlap and common ground. Below we briefly discuss some of these shared interests and concerns like a focus on individual protesters (and with this on the role of identity and emotions in social movements), movement strategies and their influence, and the implications of the digital revolution for protest.

Common Issues and Shared Interests

A first important shared interest is opening the black box of social movements to look at the individuals that make up the movements. This is of course the longstanding interest of social psychologists (Chap. 5), but it is increasingly also emphasized as an important issue in sociology (Chap. 2) and anthropology (Chap. 4). Within sociology, attention to individual protesters emerged as an important critique to the earlier more structural theories of collective

action that importantly identified the facilitative conditions for participation, but failed to explain the differences in individual responses to such conditions. More attention to the individual level is necessary not only to explain the dynamics of sustained participation and disengagement, but also to better understand the role of framing and emotions in mobilization processes and within social movement organizations. Here cross-fertilization and synthesis between sociology and social psychology seems warranted. While social psychologists try to explain individual decisions and choices to participate in collective action, sociology looks into the structural conditions that may steer these decisions, but also examine how such individual choices accumulate and result in a more or less successful movement. Anthropologists also favor an actor-oriented analysis to study the complexities of people's reasons and motivations to be part of a movement. They seek to understand the specific considerations, doubts, meaning-giving and aspirations of both participants and non-participants. The authors of the chapters on social psychology, sociology and anthropology all argue that individual processes of interpreting, analyzing and using information in the context of movement participation are still understudied.

Attention to individual protesters also brings in the ensuing issues of identity and emotions. While sociological approaches (Chap. 2) are mainly concerned with the construction and negotiation of collective identity, social psychologists (Chap. 5) carefully distinguish between collective identity as group characteristic and the identity and identification processes of individual protesters. In anthropology the emphasis is on meaning-making processes in which attention both goes to how social identities foster movement participation and to the role of culture and 'habitus' in the formation of collective identities.

Emotions and affects have become central issues in social psychology (Chap. 5), sociology (Chap. 2), and anthropology (Chap. 4). Social movement scholars have started to explore the role of emotions in motivating people to participate in collective action, in finding resonance for

social movement claims and frames and the emotional significance of mottos, metaphors, and rituals, that are invoked by protesters. Sociologists often focus on the strategic dimensions of emotions, or how activists use emotion to mobilize individuals to action and keep them involved in a movement over time. Emotions are treated as an important constitutive element of identity construction and negotiations. From a social psychological point of view, identity precedes emotions. The strength of group identifications influences how and to what extent people experience group-based emotions. Social psychologists have a long tradition of studying emotions and developed instrument and measures to explain how emotions influence cognition and behaviour. Anthropologists investigate the culturally specific aspects of emotional behavior. Their focus is on the multiple cultural expressions of emotions, emotional rules and semantics. While the role of emotions has become a subject of growing interest across the social sciences and so entered the interdisciplinary field of social movement studies, it is absent in the chapters on political science, organization studies and law.

The increased attention to identity and emotions also involves methodological challenges and innovations as discussed in the chapters on anthropology (Chap. 4) and social psychology (Chap. 5). While more traditional methods like surveys, interviews, oral history and ethnography are particularly valuable instruments to study emotions, social movement scholars also started to explore the use of experiments and physiological methods, as well as visual and auditory methods.

Strategy and tactical choice has been a central concern for political scientists, but seems almost absent in the 2015 sample of Vráblíková (Chap. 3). Instead, as Rohlinger and Gentile (Chap. 2) point out, the issue is now high on the agenda of sociologists. Current approaches seek to understand strategy as influenced by both structure and agency. While structuralist approaches understand strategic choices mainly as shaped by structural phenomenon such as political opportunity or movement culture, current relational approaches focus on strategic

choice as shaped in interaction. This also helps to explain why activists do not always act upon opportunities or do not seem to act in their best interest. Communication science (Chap. 7) looks into the particular media strategies of social movements in order to become visible and gather public support for their demands. Some activist groups incorporate ‘news hooks’ into their tactical repertoires to attract news coverage. Communication scientists also study what strategies and tactics find most media coverage. Organization research (Chap. 8) focuses on the strategic interaction between firms and social movements, trying to understand how strategies and counterstrategies are developed. Finally, legal scholars focus on the use of law and litigation as a particular movement strategy (Chap. 9). An interesting line of comparative research developed that examines relationship between governmental structures and the nature of legal mobilization. The existence of constitutional frameworks, rights, and judicial independence are singled out as key factors promoting litigation as a social movement tactic.

A final recurrent theme is the role that the internet plays in social movements. This topic is mainly discussed within sociology (Chap. 2) and communication sciences (Chap. 7). Social movement scholars pose that digital media has reshaped social activism. The Internet allows for new forms of collective behavior and action. Compared to many conventional social movement protests with identifiable membership organizations, more personalized, digitally mediated collective action formations have frequently been larger; have scaled up more quickly; and have been flexible in tracking moving political targets and bridging different issues. Internet Communication Technology (ICTs) have dramatically altered how activists communicate with the general public. Movement actors can create websites, open social media accounts, and even produce alternative forums in

an effort to communicate their issues and goals to a larger audience (Earl et al. 2010). ICTs are appealing because activists have more control over how their ideas and issues are presented to the public. Also, they allow for new forms of more ad hoc and hybrid organizing (see the chapter on organization studies, Chap. 8) and individual engagement (see the chapter on social psychology, Chap. 5). *Virtual* networks replace and complement *physical* networks. Social psychology (Chap. 5) points to the role of Facebook, Whatsapp or other forms of social media in identity construction. Digital networks enhance collective identity because online anonymity reduce the perceived differences between participants, which may foster the group’s unity.

The different approaches to similar issues are in part complementary and offer the potential for contributing to a more multi-layered analysis of social movements that combines micro, meso and macro level factors. By putting together this overview of disciplinary approaches we want to stimulate cross and interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration to come to a better understanding of current forms of collective action. We hope that these state-of-the-art reviews of the advances and challenges within the social sciences disciplines will be instrumental in encouraging theoretical debate and innovation, finding conceptual analogies or cross-disciplinary generalizations.

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