Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change

Patrick G. Coy

Editor

Emerald

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

This volume of the *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* series, our 30th, begins by casting a spotlight on the institution that the *RSMCC* series exists within and primarily serves: higher education. Thus Section I includes two papers focused on the academy itself.

Not quite so long ago, and thanks in large part to the women's movement, we learned not only that the personal is political, but that it is worth studying and theorizing about. Sociologists and political scientists have also increasingly emphasized how institutions – big and small, mainstream and alternative, public and private – are political because their varied systems of authority are not only targets of but also conduits for contention. Complicated and cross-cutting currencies of power are manifested and exchanged within and through social, cultural, and political institutions. Institutions not only offer an environment within which to network and organize, their structures and the daily processes of institutional life also frequently become targets for those seeking to change status quo arrangements. It is more than coincidental that so many of the significant challenges to institutions have been mounted by women, by people of color and by identity-based organizations and movements. In the United States, a bevy of rights-based laws have been enacted thanks in part to movement activism to remove barriers in many institutional sectors and to move to full inclusion of all people in every aspect of social life.

As we know, however, the passing of laws does not a public policy, much less a political reality, make. Institutional practices in particular are not amenable to swift and straightforward changes. Dominant, taken-for-granted social practices become embedded not only in our personal relations, but especially so in institutional settings. Institutions harbor hegemony because they reflect and reproduce it. This is of course true even for those institutions wherein the study of hegemony so frequently occurs – colleges and universities – institutions to which women have managed to gain significant access. As it turns out, access is not equality and presence is not prima facie power. This is the problem researched so well by Heather Laube through her in-depth study of the varied voices, the discursive demand-making, and the overall work of feminist sociologists in academic institutions in the United States and Canada.

Laube relies on data from 50 open-ended and loosely structured interviews with women feminist sociologists who earned their doctorates from 1969 to 2000 and who are now working at United States and Canadian (1) colleges and universities. The participants in her study teach and research at community colleges, liberal arts colleges, comprehensive colleges, and research universities. The author is particularly interested in documenting how self-identified feminist sociologists working in academia understand and negotiate the mutually reinforcing dimensions of their professional selves and their political selves, including in and through their challenges to existing academic structures.

Here we learn how, and when, these institutional insiders negotiate and resist pressures to leave their politics at the school door, choosing instead to disrupt the hegemonic practices of academic institutions in and through their activism (broadly construed) on gender issues. Extending Mary Katzenstein's study of feminist activism in the military and in the Catholic church, Laube's empirical analysis also strengthens social movement theory on the dynamics of collective identities and intersectionality in social protest. This is a study based on rich data that is thickly described in the thoughtful reflections of the feminist sociologists themselves. It is a fascinating read, made even more so by the importance of the topic and its dual contributions to feminist theory and to social movement theory.

Our second paper examines important issues associated with scholarly research in a post-9/11 world. The attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, have changed many things for many people in many places. For example, we can say without question that nearly a decade later these attacks profoundly altered the political climate in the United States. They created political openings for amendments to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978, as well as hastily-produced and ill-considered public policies, including but not restricted to the USA PATRIOT Act. Perceived threats to "national security" have been conflated with activities that previously only paranoid thinking or deeply state-centric thinking would have connected to national security. The cumulative effect of this way of thinking and the policies that have flowed from this approach has been to dramatically curtail civil liberties and fundamental freedoms previously taken for granted by many US citizens.

The ability of federal and state governments in the United States to invoke national security concerns so effortlessly and so readily has resulted in the thorough-going expansion of the state apparatus of repression. It is not just that the already sizeable investigative and surveillance powers of the FBI has been expanded on the domestic front. More ominous for civil

liberties is the fact that the CIA – previously restricted to gathering data outside the United States, and subject to little or no Congressional oversight – has been turned loose on US soil as well. Just as new communication technologies have been developed, so too have new and advanced modes of surveillance been created and deployed to penetrate the new communication mediums of citizen activists. These new surveillance technologies have been applied by the state to a full range of social movements, many or most of which have nothing whatever to do with domestic terrorism, no matter how broadly that slippery concept is defined.

As conceptions of national security have been broadened, so too have definitions of domestic terrorism such that most of the supposed manifestations of the former are now easily linked to the latter. Domestic terrorism has been redefined to even include aspects of the traditional activism of social movement organizations like Greenpeace. Regarding environmental activism, Greenpeace's tactical approach tends to fall roughly in the middle of a continuum that runs from the mainstream lobbying of legislatures and industry done by the Natural Resources Defense Council on the one end, to the monkeywrenching sometimes practiced by much more radical environmental groups like EarthFirst on the other end.

These profound changes in the political climate not only have demonstrable impacts on the work of social movements, they also bring increased risks to social movement researchers and especially to those activists who participate in that research. How can the data collected by social movement researchers be protected from the increasingly long arm of the state security apparatus? This is the problem pondered so thoughtfully by Kathleen Blee and Tim Vining in their paper on the ethics of social movement research in a post-9/11 political climate. Blee and Vining focus their discussion on the existing and new problems associated with researchers' use of the following in the new political climate: confidentiality agreements, informed consent procedures, certificates of confidentiality, and researcher privilege.

The authors identify the important questions researchers now need to ask themselves and they provide helpful guidance in how to answer them, questions like: "Might there be some data that are not worth the risk to collect, and some studies that should not be done in this political–legal climate?" How likely is it that one might be called as an "unwilling expert" in litigation directed at one's research participants? How likely is it that data gathered for one purpose might put research participants at risk in other areas due to the power of subpoena, for example? How does one balance the

potential benefits accruing to social movements from scholarly research with the increased risks associated with the same? How can researchers go beyond a duty to do no harm and move closer toward a duty to do good?

The thoughtful reflections contained in this paper are well-grounded not only in the existing literature on researcher risks and ethics, but also in a sober approach to the changed political climate. Given its many theoretical and practical contributions, the Blee and Vining paper is certain to be well cited and deserving of wide readership in graduate seminars across the social sciences in the coming decade.

The papers in the next section of the volume, Section II, are linked by their investigation of the dynamics of political protest. The first paper in this section also provides a bridge to Section I, as it focuses as well on the effects of state-based repression on the public protests of social movements. This is a welcome study because despite a growing set of both theoretical and empirical studies on the "dissent-repression nexus," the impacts of repression on the rate of future public protest is in many respects still a largely unsettled question. At least key parts of it were, and at least until now, that is.

The focus of the deeply empirical research by Jennifer Earl and Sarah Soule utilizes time-series data on protest events (aggregated weekly) as reported by the *New York Times* to determine the lagged and nonlinear impacts of five specific kinds of police repression on macro trends in protest rates in New York City from 1960 to 1990. The specifying of five police tactics is important because in the same way that the state has many tactics beyond policing available to it with which to respond to social movement protests, police at protests have a range of policing tactics available to them. Moreover, not only is that range increasing thanks to new surveillance, new transportation, and new communication technologies being made use of by police forces, but past studies have too often failed to disaggregate protest policing tactics, making research findings less useful than they otherwise would be.

Earl and Soule find that different police strategies have different effects. policing strategies tend to have linear effects, the strongest effects of police tactics occur in the short term, that is, in a few weeks, and different social movements react to protest policing in different ways. Beyond this, there is far too much else of importance in this ambitious yet highly successful piece of scholarship to summarize further here. Suffice is to say that Jennifer Earl and Sarah Soule have gone far in unraveling in meaningful ways the complicated and intersecting strands of the dissent-repression nexus. Future researchers approaching this nexus will be in their debt.

The social movement research theory building that is accomplished in this volume of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* continues with the paper by Dana Fisher. Much previous research has established what has become somewhat of a truism in social movement scholarship: new recruits to protest activism tend to find their way into activism through their connections to people already active in the movement. In other words, social networks matter deeply in recruitment and in mobilization. While this is a well-established finding, and one that has generated much subsequent research that has built on it in various ways, it is still not a very nuanced finding. Perhaps that is the nature of anything that has managed to rise to the level of a truism. In any event, we know much less, for example, about whether different kinds of social networks impact recruitment to different degrees in different kinds of places. The paired comparative design of Fisher's research and the collection of original data in two countries help her push into new theoretical territory.

The author used a two-stage research design that combined original data collection on participants at protest events through a random survey conducted on site of the protest, followed up by a subsequent e-mail survey. Moreover, she focused on two different large-scale protests in two different countries (France and the United States), and on *both* social and organizational networks. In the United States, Fisher studied protest against the 2004 Republican National Convention, comparing it with the 2006 protests against a controversial youth labor law in France, the *Contrat Première Embauche* (CPE). Among much else, she finds that while social and organizational ties play similar roles in mobilizing US activists, organizational ties are much more significant than social ties in mobilizations in France. With this study Dana Fisher has constructed a solid theoretical foundation, and one rooted in empirical comparative case analysis, for investigating how various kinds of social networks may facilitate protest participation in various contexts.

We continue the theme of political protest in this section of the volume with a third paper, by Ana Cristina Maldonado, who provides an illuminating analysis of the protest politics of Cuba's Movimiento Cristiano Liberacion (MCL). Maldonado describes in detail MCL's Varela Project and also the historical evolution of its strategy of "legal dissent," that is, creating a movement with a uniquely Cuban political vision that is in direct competition with that of the Cuban government, but which nonetheless works through legislative and legal means protected under Cuba's constitution. She helpfully situates her analysis of MCL's work within the theoretical framework developed by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink,

including their work on transnational advocacy networks. In this model, significant governmental changes are sometimes accomplished by relying on a combination of internal pressures from domestic civic organizations and external pressures from international actors, the relative weighting of the combination determined in part by domestic political conditions and considerations.

Maldonado's multi-method research, based on interviews with key MCL activists and others, public opinion surveys of the Cuban population, and careful mining of a wide-range of NGO reports, websites, and scholarly articles, provides a thorough-going analysis of the MCL's legal dissent strategy within Cuba, including its strengths and weaknesses. The author argues that MCL is quietly laying the foundation for an alternative political project in Cuba – a project based in domestic law, the Cuban constitution, and on international human rights law that Cuba is party to. Maldonado clearly privileges the importance of domestic pressures if MCL is to be effective, highlighting such salient issues as the degree to which MCL should focus on top-down, bottom-up, or middle-out domestic political pressures.

The use of the Internet by social movement organizations to disseminate information and to recruit and mobilize participants has expanded exponentially in recent years and in ways hardly imagined even less than a decade ago. Thus, we conclude this section focused on various dimensions of political protest with a paper examining the connections between online activism, protest politics, and electoral politics. One of the online organizations that has been at the forefront in the United States in using information communication technologies in these ways is Moveon.org.

In her case study of Moveon.org, Victoria Carty argues that Moveon's creation of a "grassroots virtual community" through the electronic sharing of information and its ability to "leverage the Internet to organize people in face-to-face forms of contentious and institutional politics" calls for changes in how scholars of both social movements and of electoral politics theorize about such foundational concepts as recruitment, mobilization, and participatory democracy. Carty suggests that Moveon's tactical innovations and entrepreneurial flexibility has allowed it not only to tap into submerged networks but to create new ones, magnifying political outreach and impacts. The author also argues that Moveon's online activism has helped shift the mechanics of contentious protest and electoral politics, building new and increasingly well-traveled bridges between them.

We conclude this volume with Section III, which includes three papers linked by their various connections to the theoretical framework of frame analysis in social movements research. April Lee Dove leads off the section

with a comparative case analysis of the framing work done by two organizations prominent in the opposition to undocumented immigration into the United States along the Mexican border, namely, the Minuteman Project, Inc., and the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps. This is important research for at least two reasons. First, we have far too empirical studies of right wing or reactionary social movement organizations, despite both their prominence and significance in most countries, including the United States. Second, while the social movement literature on framing is well-developed, Dove's paper demonstrates that there is still room for useful theory building in framing analysis.

Based on a qualitative study of the content of the websites of the respective organizations, Dove focuses her comparative analysis of the two groups on what are often called a movement's "core framing tasks." As described by David Snow and Robert Benford, they are diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational action framing. Considered in turn and collectively, such framing work by social movement organizations attempts to answer the *what, why,* and *how* questions for potential participants in movement actions. To her credit, Dove also attends to the importance of credibility framing. She not only shows the similarities and differences that these two organizations take to these four framing tasks, but more importantly, she clearly demonstrates that these core framing tasks are not always sufficient.

In fact, April Lee Dove quite effectively argues that her research demonstrates that the framing perspective has historically not captured the importance of *where* the social problem exists and also *where* the intended mobilization should take place. Geographic and place frames may matter, and they may matter in manifold ways. Geographic and place frames key into the "where" questions that can often be important components of the participation puzzle, even if they have historically been undertheorized by social movement scholars.

Our second paper in this section, by Christopher Wetzel, further confirms that useful contributions to framing theory can still be made and are, in fact, much needed. Concerned with how social movement organizations strategically frame their actions in order to appeal simultaneously to quite diverse populations, Wetzel provides a case study of the framing work that accompanied the occupation of Alcatraz Island in the United States from 1969 to 1971 by the Indians of All Tribes group. The author conducted research in three different sets of archives: the Alcatraz Indian Occupation Records at the San Francisco Public Library, the Radio Free Alcatraz recordings of the Pacifica Radio Archives at Stanford University, and the

Park Archives and Records Center of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. A total of 190 different documents from the Indians of All Tribes organization were collected and inductively coded for qualitative analysis, providing a rich, data-driven analysis that speaks to important questions.

We know far too little about when, and precisely how, social movement organizations may differentially direct the participation of various constituencies into certain kinds of activities. More important, we know even less about when, and how, movements actually attempt to discourage, or to deflect and turn back participation by certain constituencies. Yet movement organizers do, in fact, not only direct participation differentially, but they also discourage certain would-be supporters from becoming heavily involved in certain movement activities. For example, the Indians of All Tribes group highlighted inappropriate behavior by overzealous whites who supported the occupation of Alcatraz in order to deflect similar kinds of involvement by other white allies in the future. Wetzel shows us that this is framing work, too, and that it is not only understudied but also undertheorized, until now. This is especially true for identity-based movements of traditionally marginalized populations. Consequently, Wetzel's tripartite framing schema of inflection, direction, and deflection makes an original and an important theoretical contribution, even while building on earlier approaches to understanding movement framing work.

We conclude the volume with a strong paper by Andrew Martin that straddles somewhat the respective literatures on media selection bias and framing by movements, with an emphasis on the former. The author does this through an analysis of the content of the United Steelworker's publication, *Steelabor*, during the 1990s. Previous studies on media selection bias, that is, documenting what events do and do not get covered, have primarily been focused on mainstream publications, especially major daily newspapers. Martin fruitfully extends this research by redirecting our attention to movement publications, where he finds that many of the same selection biases that characterize mainstream publications are present in movement publications as well.

To accomplish this, the author read every issue of *Steelabor* during the decade of the 1990s cover-to-cover to identify and then analyzed all articles having to do with a defined set of events: strikes or organizing drives. His quantitative analysis suggests that the United Steelworkers strategically used its publication to frame itself in a favorable light, providing further evidence that movement publications are used to call attention to specific events and to influence how both internal and external actors interpret the organization and its work. Martin goes on to make some important

recommendations for how the selection biases of movement publications can be accounted for by scholars studying other movements in the future.

Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change has been published for over 30 years, making it one of the longest running scholarly book series. However, more impressive than the length of the series' scholarly run is the quality of its content. With this volume, the *RSMCC* series has once again done what it has always done so well: showcase deeply empirical and often multi-method research by senior and junior scholars alike, research that builds upon while extending and even going beyond existing theoretical traditions.

I thank the anonymous peer reviewers whose selfless service makes all of this possible. I also thank my assistant, Vasili Rukhadze, who helped bring this volume to fruition in important ways, but in ways too numerous to detail here.

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