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What if, instead of focusing on resource-poor movements, we shift the analysis to explain the rise and life cycle of resourceful movements? Would theories of social movements and contention designed to account for collective action of relatively powerless groups do? Or, should we follow a different logic to explain collective action by polity members who respond defensively to threats to what they already have? For McVeigh, the analysis of activism by relatively advantaged conservative groups can be partly advanced using tools developed with progressive, resource-poor social movements. However, because the thrust of conservative right-wing movements is to protect the status quo or prevent change, they require a distinct theorization. This is McVeigh’s task that in *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, which joins those surprisingly few works on right-wing activism. And while one could take issue with an attempt to build a theory and develop a model based on one single case study, McVeigh’s book does an important job in making a significant step forward in this direction.

To advance our understanding of right-wing activism, McVeigh studies the second rise of the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s (there is a fascinating historical chapter on this process), and develops what he terms the power-devaluation model (PD). The justification for the PD model, according to McVeigh, is found in a lacuna he identifies in extant models and theories on social movements. Resource mobilization and political opportunity theories would ask why relatively advantaged groups that have resources and enjoy routine access to politics mobilize in the first place. Therefore, the role of grievances—neglected by these theories—is imperative for understanding right-wing activism. Yet, unlike their role in classical collective-behavior theories, grievances do not automatically translate into participation in social movements, rather they “alter individuals’ perceptions of their circumstances and provide opportunities to construct new interpretive frames that generate support for right-wing mobilization” (p. 43). The PD model then focuses first on the development of grievances on the part of a specified privileged collectivity as a result of a threat to its members’ established positions and interests. This threat, in itself the result of macrostructural changes in society’s power relations, can manifest itself in the weakening of “purchasing power.” This is evident in three interdependent markets; economy, political, and status. “Incentives to support right-wing activism should be particularly strong when groups are experiencing power devaluation from multiple sources and in more than one market” (p. 41–2).

Still, as McVeigh points out, power devaluation by itself does not directly stimulate right-wing activism; it is crucial for organizers and recruiters to engage in strategic framing in a way that would convince group members that social change is desirable and possible, and would inspire them to participate in collective action. Drawing upon Snow and his colleagues, McVeigh convincingly shows how KKK leaders engaged in something like micro-economic framing, which played on the ratio between supply and demand and activated a strong sense of we-ness among those “100 per-cent Americans.” Thus, regarding the devaluation of the political purchasing power of native-born, white Protestants in the face of massive immigration and, hence, new votes, McVeigh shows how KKK leaders called for a decrease in supply (e.g., restrictions on immigration) and boosting of demand for Klan constituents (e.g., bloc voting and increased voters turnout). Finally, to capitalize on this structural, environmental, and perceptual infrastructure of threat and grievances, the PD model stipulates the importance of activating preexisting of organizational resources and exploiting pre-existing political opportunities in determining the movement’s growth and trajectory on the way to reverse devaluation.

The PD model allows McVeigh to offer a compelling, highly nuanced account of the rise, rapid growth, and the impact of the KKK on U.S. local and national politics during the first half of the 1920 (but also its fall during the second half of the 1920s). Readers would easily relate to the
No sooner had the structural view of social movements fully gelled in the late 1970s and early 1980s than critics were complaining about its inadequate approach to meaning, symbols, social psychology—in a word, culture. Alain Touraine and his many students developed an alternative that highlighted decisions and collective identities; Bill Gamson and his students staged experiments that demonstrated the importance not only of framing processes but even of emotions; Dave Snow and his many collaborators showed that what was important about networks was the messages that flowed across them, an idea that resulted in the famous article of 1986 that defined frame alignment processes. Within a few years the structuralists reacted so as to incorporate (at least) frames in their models, and it was suddenly hard to ignore cultural meanings and their embodied artifacts. The world had changed once again.

After a quarter century, the time is right for some kind of stock taking, which Hank Johnston provides in this enticing new volume. Some contributors are famous names neatly summarizing their favorite forms of culture, such as Francesca Polletta on narrative, Gary Alan Fine on reputation, and Donatella della Porta on the democracy of social forums. They demonstrate how much the cultural turn has accomplished.

Johnston also reached out to other scholars to develop this would surely have strengthened the book. Finally, there seems to be an unfinished agenda when accounting for the fact that KKK’s support was especially strong in communities dominated by native-born, white Protestants. McVeigh most competently employs a combination of structural and perceptual mode of explanation (qualitatively and quantitatively alike), and yet it seems that a more explicit incorporation of a relational mode of analysis would nicely complement his explanation. Greater attention to how contacts and interactions among groups and individuals in ethnically and racially diversified places, while inflating tension and animosity among them, might also provide opportunities for dialogue and mutual respect would possibly cast more light on why the KKK particularly thrived in nondiversified places.

Regardless of these issues, The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan is an exemplary scholarly work with significant contribution to both the study of social movements and contentious politics and the study of racial and ethnic conflict.


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showcase less-known tools of cultural analysis. Sveta Klimova applies speech act theory to three Russian protest movements, distinguishing a variety of claims based on different felicity conditions and audiences. The chapter is interesting precisely because Klimova knows more philosophy than movement theory. Ingrid Miethe returns to Goffman’s original discussion of frame alignment to revive “keying” to explain how individuals add layers to frames. Because they understand movement frames differently, participants respond to events differently; in her case a number of East German women left the peace movement after 1989 while others remained. By hermeneutically placing the meaning of their activism in the context of their biographies, she can account for such differences.

Examining metaphors in union speeches, Gabriel Ignatow finds—to his surprise—that the same figures of speech appear in both internal discussions and external rhetoric despite the different audiences. Darcy Leach and Sebastian Haunss clarify and to some extent displace the idea of free spaces and related concepts with that of “scenes,” integrated networks of both people and locales that help focus on the physical practices rather than the ideas of a subculture. I especially liked John Krinsky and Colin Barker’s introduction to cultural–historical activity theory (known cheerily as CHAT), which developed in the Soviet Union but highlights the Marx of 1848, concerned with agency, creativity, strategy, utterances (a broader category than speech acts, since it includes gestures), genres, and dialogue. It has striking parallels with pragmatism and early symbolic interactionism.

This volume will be useful as a catalogue of cultural concepts, and all readers will find something to help them sharpen their analyses. (If their library can afford to buy it.) But the sum is less than the parts. There is no synergy or dialogue between the chapters (and the approaches they represent), nor does the editor’s introduction provide this. There is little sense of the past here: Touraine is mentioned briefly, for his methodology not his cultural approach; frame alignment appears primarily as a foil. Even as central a cultural term as collective identity is addressed partly in one chapter and only glancingly in a couple others. A few authors compare their favorite concepts with other ideas, but primarily using straw versions of the latter. Emotions, which to me are a central component of culture as well as the subject of a lot of recent attention, are almost entirely missing.

Such a narrow focus is no surprise in the world of the research university where disciplines long ago fragmented. But the study of protest has followed an especially fractal path. Cultural and structural and rational-choice approaches have little to do with one another. People who study one movement don’t read much literature on other movements. And now, it seems, different cultural approaches to protest and movements don’t even feel the need to talk to one another.

Ignoring the past and being too specialized in the present are not good for the future, either. Analytic creativity can only come from engagement between viewpoints and between movement specialties. I would like to know how metaphors, narratives, and “fact” claims work together rhetorically, how characters and reputations are associated with or created by metaphors; how different forums or scenes use different combinations of cultural meanings and embodiments. How do speech acts differ from narratives, from discourse, from deliberation? Better, how can and do these fit together? When might we best use one concept, when another? And, once we understand speech acts, utterances, and deliberation, how does this help us understand creativity, decision making, and action? Meaning is everywhere, but it is not everything. My own inclination is to think we can pull such threads together in an interpretive and actor-centered approach, but Krinsky and Barker also speak of structural “totalities.” If they are right that creativity arises from interaction, then we need more engagement of different voices and perspectives in the analysis of protest. We need more than a series of authors all hawking their own snake oil to the exclusion of others.

This means we need theorizing, something we have been told is unproductive. Even in this volume, the theoretical bits are embedded in case studies, as though we could not engage in theoretical argumentation without illustrations. I fear we have lost the ability to reflect on and criticize our concepts and explanatory languages, to judge them for internal sense as well as external fit. Our methodological standards have multiplied while our theoretical ones have dwindled. The theoretical and the empirical must always interact, but each also needs its own autonomous development and standards.


Eve Shapiro
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The centrality of science in twenty-first century lives is irrefutable. The increasing re-
liance on science to legitimate knowledge, substantiate social policies, and justify social action—what some have called scientization—has implications for national and transnational politics and movements around the globe. As science and technology come to dominate knowledge production, sociopolitical power becomes consolidated in the hands of scientific experts working with and through science-focused multinational corporations. Scholars in a variety of disciplines have documented increasing levels of biomedical intervention in plants, animals and humans around the world. Scientific research is used to justify and engage in wars, to rationalize national and international public policy, and in many other arenas of social life that are increasingly shaped by science. Social movement scholars in particular have documented how this process has privileged expert knowledge at the cost of lay experience and shifted the terrain of contestation, so that many movements have refocused their energies on science and technology.

In Mobilizing Science: Movements, Participation, and the Remaking of Knowledge, Sabrina McCormick brings the increasing sociopolitical power of scientific study into conversation with social movement literatures through her empirical examination of two anti-scientization movement case studies. The first case draws on McCormick’s larger body of scholarship on grassroots breast cancer organizing over the past twenty years within the U.S. environmental breast cancer movement, a movement focused in large part on environmental pollutants. The second case examines the anti-dam movement in Brazil, a populist movement that has endeavored to change reigning dam policies which use large-scale impact studies to invalidate the environmental and cultural claims of citizens. While different in many ways, these two case studies share a focus on lay participation in scientific knowledge creation and attendant policy making. Using these two cases as a launching point, McCormick endeavors to create a typology of antiscientization movements, what she calls “democratizing science movements.” Her seeks to identify catalysts for movement formation and mechanisms for success, as well as to catalog tactics and strategies that increase the likelihood of movement cooptation and neutralization.

What McCormick finds is that the increasingly symbiotic relationship between transnational corporations, charged with developing, orchestrating, and drawing conclusions from research, and local, national, and international governmental agencies shuts everyday citizens out of social and political policy making around the world. In the case of breast cancer this manifests in an almost exclusive focus on genetic instead of environmental factors in public and medical discourses on causation. In Brazil, lay citizens (particularly indigenous communities) are excluded from most research endeavors used to justify national dam building despite the dam’s displacement of whole communities and destruction of local environments. In both of these cases lay citizens have banded together in response to these exclusions and created social movements aimed at broadening public participation in scientific knowledge and policy production.

Building on her recent book about the environmental breast cancer movement, No Family History (2008, Rowman & Littlefield), McCormick theorizes these new movements as efforts to develop new forms of participatory research, and charts their strengths, vulnerabilities, and failures. She argues that these diverse movements endeavor to bring lay citizens back into scientific knowledge production by generating new research questions, methods, and findings, thereby democratizing social policy making. Most significantly these movements have created change by engaging scientists in movement activity and forming alliances between citizens and experts. It is these collaborations that allow democratizing science movements to reframe the issues at hand, influence the trajectory and focus of research, and garner the attention of holders. However, as detailed in the book, scientists often risk their reputations when engaging in participatory research, and movements risk cooptation through participation in ineffectual lay-researcher alliances. Efforts at democratization are easily derailed by power–holders through the creation of superficial participatory institutions and marginalized by the increasingly strong ties between scientific corporations and national and international governmental agencies. McCormick’s conclusions, that democratizing science movements have the potential to remake power relations but face significant and persistent obstacles, reiterate the complexity of participatory social and political endeavors.

Certainly this book is valuable to scholars and activists of environmental and science movements as it offers an important analysis of how and to what end movements can contest existing scientific and political structures. More broadly, Mobilizing Science makes two key contributions to social movement scholarship. First, this robust and nuanced examination of two very different case studies highlights the theoretical benefits of analyzing across different social movements, national boundaries, and ideological positions. In this case doing so allowed McCormick to chart multiple paths toward success and cooptation within democratizing science movements, and draw more generalizable conclu-
nebojșa vladasavljević. serbia’s antibureaucratic revolution: milošević, the fall of communism and nationalist mobilization. new york: palgrave macmillan, 2008. $74.95 (hardcover).

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nebojșa vladasavljević offers us a powerful reminder that ordinary people can accomplish extraordinary things. his case in point is the antibureaucratic revolution in serbia in the late 1980s. the oft-told story of the revolution is that political elites, most notably slobodan milošević, orchestrated the widespread mobilizations for their own political pursuits by tapping into the population’s nationalist sentiments. this book offers two important correctives to this account: first, elites were not necessarily responsible for the early stages of mobilization; and, second, nationalism was not just a cause, but also an outcome of the movement. for scholars of social movements, the book is engaging for its attention to political opportunity structures, networks, and framing in its analytical narrative of this revolutionary moment.

the story of the revolution principally takes place in the interim between tito’s death and the breakup of yugoslavia. the former event created a power vacuum in the federation, instigating a series of struggles among ideological and generational factions of the political elites. the author argues that these divisions created space for groups to mobilize under the authoritarianism that had previously suppressed such actions. the grievances of the participants, however, did not initially revolve around ethnic loyalties, but instead reflected a wide range of socioeconomic and political frustrations. thus, the broad canvas that vladasavljević paints is of several small movements being simultaneously activated by a shifting political opportunity structure. the role of elites was minimal; they assisted only by failing to act, further exposing their infighting and vulnerability.

after the nascent phase of demonstrations, the movements snowballed through the strategic maneuvering of activists, who were able to use networks and sympathetic media to articulate demands and disseminate information about events. the author also attributes success to the frames employed by the movements, which rejected specific policies or bureaucrats while concurrently expressing loyalty to the federation. as political tensions continued and the wave of mobilization grew, milošević began to coopt the movement in serbia, buttressing his populism and reducing his opponents’ power while encouraging the nationalist fervor that would subsequently contribute to the breakup of yugoslavia.

for all the book’s strengths, there are two points that i would have liked to see pursued with more theoretical vigor. first, the author argues that the initial movements stemmed from multiple and varied grievances; it only later took on a decidedly nationalist flavor in a larger wave of mobilization, a consequence of the federation’s tendency to reinforce national allegiances. how exactly these identities became more salient for the participants is unclear, creating the sense that the antibureaucratic revolution was an altogether separate phenomenon from the subsequent secessionist movements. second, the book sets out to dismantle the view that elites wholly coordinated the protests and strikes, but “elites” as a concept remains vague and implicit. instead, the analysis treats actors as a dichotomous variable, either “elites” or “ordinary people,” with less attention paid to what defines each category and the variations that exist within them. the author missed an opportunity to explain why the difference is important, why we should care whether the movers and shakers were milošević and friends or “just” activists, miners, and serbian.
For the social movements field, the book is most valuable for its masterful analysis, which pairs a state-centered approach with a critical eye towards elite power. Vladisavljević, on the one hand, takes seriously the restrictive nature of authoritarianism during the period, readily admitting the substantial influence and control of the political class within the communist regime. Had there not been turmoil in the upper echelons of government, the movements may not have gained momentum. On the other hand, he creatively highlights the ability of the activists and protesters to organize and take advantage of the unstable political context. This is accomplished using a wealth of empirical materials, including media reports of the protests and interviews with both politicians and activists of the period. For the novices of Serbian history, the measure of historical detail at times overwhelms, but the author is careful to refocus the account and remind the reader of the broader implications.

Equally impressive, Serbia’s Antihierarchical Revolution contradicts the current historical record of Milošević’s rise to power and the ensuing nationalism. Indeed, Vladisavljević’s bottom-up perspective redeems the voice and agency of the non-elite, rejecting accounts that cast them as mere puppets. That he is able to do so with such theoretical and empirical sophistication makes the argument all the more compelling and an enjoyable read.


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How do coalitions form and develop between two causes as distinct as the labor and environmental movements? While the former operates within the realm of work and economy, the latter exemplifies new social movements’ pursuit of nonmaterial goals. In Blue-Green Coalitions, Brian Mayer confronts this paradox by identifying their common ground, namely, the adverse effects of workplace related toxins on health. Though toxins released by factories and plants frequently prove harmful to their surrounding communities, the workers at such sites face a disproportionately high risk of injury due to their own levels of exposure. Mayer argues that an alliance between these workers and the broader environmental movement presents a more effective challenge against these toxic risks than either party acting alone.

Mayer examines this cross-movement collaboration through three contemporary cases in the United States, specifically the New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC), the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow (AHT) from Massachusetts, and the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition (SVTC). Each of which had succeeded in creating lasting and politically influential coalitions. Mayer selected these cases due to their state and regional-level focus, geographical variation, and strong emphasis on health. Though all three hail from states that traditionally support the Democratic Party, each case faces different levels of union support and political access. Perhaps most interesting, each case represents a different stage in what Mayer terms “the coalition life course,” a term that he uses to refer to the set of stages coalitions experience from formation (AHT), to maintenance (WEC), and finally dissolution (SVTC).

Following the introduction, Mayer presents an historical overview of collaboration between labor and environmental causes and dedicates a chapter to each of his selected cases. The historical chapter begins its analysis during the progressive movement and the origins of public health and urban environmental reform in the 1910s and concludes with the “Turtles and Teamsters” alliance spotlighted during the World Trade Organization protests of November, 1999. His first case, the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, originated in 2001 and included a coalition of scientists, activists, and public health officials. The coalition looked to the Massachusetts labor movement for support in implementing the precautionary principle, a platform which advocates for the avoidance of all potentially harmful activities until the activities’ proponents provide scientific proof demonstrating occupational and environmental safety. This coalition generated 144 member groups and found a number of allies within the Massachusetts state legislature.

The second case, the New Jersey Work Environment Council, was formed in 1986 to advocate for the right to know which harmful substances a worker or community member might be exposed to. Arguably, WEC’s accomplishments may exceed any other blue-green coalition through their involvement in both right to know and later right to act campaigns, a coalition that has been maintained and still thrives today.

The last case focuses on the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, an effort that targeted the toxins produced by the high-tech industry in Silicon Valley. Despite lacking union presence among SVTC’s active workers, the coalition was
partially responsible for the success of California’s Proposition 65, which introduced a right-to-know policy to the state. The blue-green coalition later dissolved as the coalition shifted its focus from antitoxic substances to environmental justice, at which point labor ceased its support.

To explain the formation of these blue-green alliances, Mayer uses a theoretical integration of political opportunities, framing, and resources. While Mayer finds political opportunities—including critical events—as a necessary but insufficient condition, he places a greater emphasis on bridging processes. These bridging processes include frame bridging, to link the messages of workers and environmentalists, and bridge brokering, in which skilled community leaders facilitate exchanges between laborers and environmentalists. Mayer draws additional attention to the identity work used to minimize the divide in interests, as well as the power of narratives. He uses this approach in lieu of theories on social movement spillover, frame disputes, and frame pyramids, which he argues as inadequate when applied to cross-movement coalitions.

Drawing upon two dozen ethnographic observations, 112 interviews, and countless documents, Blue–Green Coalitions excels at providing in-depth histories of the three coalitions and the greater background of collaborations between the two camps. However, the book could benefit from a more refined treatment of social movement theory. Particularly, the dismissal of relatively specific, recent social movement concepts (spillover, frame disputes, and frame pyramids) in favor of more general, older ideas (political opportunity, resources, and framing) suggests a theoretical step backwards. While the book does not empirically falsify the concepts it dismisses, it does quickly claim they do not apply to cross-movement settings. While the attention to frame bridging and bridge brokering is appreciated, the level of emphasis for these concepts necessitates a thorough review of the longstanding bridging and brokerage literatures in the field of social networks. In the end, the book leaves the reader with limited abilities to generalize to other cross-movement coalitions, for this Mayer dedicates a single paragraph at the conclusion. Greater attention on how to apply its lessons to other cross-movement coalitions would have proven beneficial to the more general field of social movements.

Blue–Green Coalitions will provide an excellent read for both activists and scholars interested in the environmental and antitoxic movement, as well as those curious about the politics of workplace safety. Though Mayer’s depth in these cases provides an outline of cross-movement coalition processes, future research in the area may improve upon this field through greater specificity to theories and concepts while also addressing multiple cross-movement coalition configurations.


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Smith provides an historical, comparative analysis of the adoption of gay and lesbian civil rights policy in Canada and the United States from 1969 through the mid-2000s. Her primary goal is to explain why Canada consistently expanded lesbian and gay rights over the period while the United States did not, focusing on three key goals of the lesbian and gay movement in both countries: the decriminalization of sodomy, the passage of discrimination protection, and marriage equity. Largely discounting variations in religiosity, public opinion, and social movements as explanations, Smith instead focuses on political differences between the two nations. More specifically, she relies upon historical institutionalism, emphasizing the importance of political party structure, the relationship between federal and subnational governments, the role of the courts, and the legacy of past policy decisions. The book is organized chronologically, documenting key turning points in the historical development of gay and lesbian rights in both countries including the decriminalization of sodomy in Canada in 1969 and the lack of equivalent reform in the United States, the significant policy losses in the United States during the 1980s including Bowers v. Hardwick and the successes in Canada during the same period, and the implications of these and other policy decisions on each country’s response to same-sex marriage.

In each chapter, Smith documents the impact of formal political structures and the legacy of previous policy decisions on specific lesbian and gay policies, arguing that the initial successes in Canada set the nation on a trajectory of extending civil rights so that it became increasingly dissimilar to the United States over time. For example, Canada was able to decriminalize consensual sexual relationships in 1969, much earlier than the United States. Because criminal law is a responsibility of the Canadian federal government, once the administration decided to decrim-
inalize sodomy it did so fairly quickly. In contrast, decriminalization was a responsibility of U.S. states requiring a time consuming and resource-draining state-by-state strategy that was not completed until 2003 with the U.S. Supreme Court decision Lawrence v. Texas. This initial policy divergence was one of the reasons Canada was able to grant discrimination protection to gays and lesbians in 1985 while the United States still lacks federal protection. Opponents of gay and lesbian rights were able to use the continued criminalization of gay sex sexual to justify denying further rights to the gay and lesbian community. In addition, opponents to lesbian and gay rights in the United States have more access points to government, particularly through the ballot initiative process, which Canada lacks, making it easier to block or roll back progress.

Overall, Smith’s analysis is convincing and useful, contributing to both the research on gay and lesbian politics as well as the broader research on policy change and social movement outcomes. Particularly innovative is the link made between gay and lesbian politics and other policy domains in each country. For example, while the lesbian and gay movement often stresses the similarities between its demands and the demands of the civil rights movement, Smith argues that these two movements are also linked by opponents and government officials. This linkage has been detrimental for the lesbian and gay movement as general support for the liberal policies of the 1960s and 1970s declined. Canada does not have the same legacy. Instead, the more recent passage of the Canadian Charter created a modern, inclusive definition of rights in which gays and lesbians were more easily incorporated. Tying lesbian and gay rights to debates about Quebec’s independence and Canadian unity, Smith argues that the inclusion of gay and lesbian rights under the Canadian Charter was framed as support for Canadian identity rather than special rights. Smith illustrates that understanding lesbian and gay rights does not require unique explanations, and that scholarship on lesbian and gay politics has implications for other research; points with which I strongly agree.

Smith’s cross national focus and attention to both legislative and judicial lawmaking are additional strengths of her analysis. Most research on the gay and lesbian movement focuses on one country, making Smith’s study a strong addition to the small, but growing, cross national research on lesbian and gay politics. There also tends to be a division between scholars who study gay and lesbian politics and those that study the progress of gay and lesbian rights through the courts, a division that reflects general disciplinary boundaries. Yet, these two paths to policy change are intimately intertwined, with specific policy objectives like the decriminalization of sodomy and marriage rights being achieved through both paths. Smith shows how decisions in the two legal arenas were linked, with judicial decisions and legislative actions playing off one another in ways that facilitated change in Canada and slowed it in the United States.

That said, Smith’s argument is very structural, focusing on the ins and outs of the formal political system with little room for agency. While this may explain differences between Canada and the United States, it is less applicable when considering subnational variations. While not a goal of her book, some states and provinces have been more supportive of lesbian and gay civil rights, suggesting that factors other than political structures may matter since political structures are more similar across states and provinces than between the two nations. In addition, Smith overstates the lack of attention to political structure in social movement research. Scholars of the lesbian and gay movement have not paid particular attention to the formal political system, but other movement scholars have. Amenta and his political mediation model come to mind.

Overall, scholars of gay and lesbian politics and those interested in movement outcomes would benefit from reading Smith’s analysis. I found the book to be fairly accessible and would benefit from making it easier to block or roll back progress.

Overall, scholars of gay and lesbian politics and those interested in movement outcomes would benefit from reading Smith’s analysis. I found the book to be fairly accessible and would consider assigning it in upper-division and graduate classes in social movements, political sociology, and gay and lesbian politics.


Dennis J. Downey
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The Making of Pro-Life Activists is an engaging examination of social movement mobilization, focused on the relationship between beliefs and action in mobilization processes. Munson’s starting point is the conventional assumption that support for a cause is the central precursor and impetus to activism. Munson challenges that fundamental assumption. He states, “The link between beliefs and action in social movements must be turned on its head: real action often precedes meaningful beliefs about an issue” (p. 20).

Munson’s research is based on a series of life history interviews (N = 111) with pro-life activists and with non-activists who generally
hold pro-life positions. That comparison purposefully contrasts with previous research examining differences between pro-life and pro-choice activists which, he insightfully points out, leads naturally to a focus on differences in belief systems. His own comparison is structured to examine why, among those with similar sympathies, some will be mobilized and others will not. He conducted his interviews in four cities throughout the United States (Oklahoma City, Charleston, Boston, and Minneapolis-St. Paul), collectively chosen to integrate variation across both level of mobilization and religious composition (Protestant versus Catholic), although neither of those variables ultimately proved to have an influence on mobilization.

Munson’s interviews suggest that what separates pro-life activists and non-activists is not the nature of their beliefs, at least, not at the crucial point of mobilization. That conclusion is supported by the following surprising finding “Almost half of all activists in my sample did not hold pro-life beliefs prior to their involvement in the pro-life movement” (p. 43). Instead, beliefs are shaped largely through activism itself; that is, rather than beliefs being the cause of activism, they are more often the outcomes of mobilization.

What, then, explains mobilization? Munson relies here on the concept of “turning points,” i.e., “those periods when people are required to make significant changes in their everyday life and, as a result, must also reorient their way of looking at and understanding the world” (p. 55). Turning points represent not only a time when people are biographically available, but also when they are cognitively and emotionally available. Contact with a movement must take place at turning points in order to catalyze contact into activism. It is turning points, rather than beliefs, which represent the essential necessary variable in his model.

Munson’s model not only adds complexity to our understanding of mobilization, but an important element of contingency. For his respondents, “activism emerged not because they consciously sought it out to express their beliefs but as an unintended result of their ordinary lives” (p. 44). That represents a valuable corrective to any overly rationalized model in which mobilization is determined by any short list of variables. While those findings might be seen as pessimistic in that they present obstacles to mobilization which movement actors can do little to control, they also suggest that “the pool of potential activists is far from limited to existing conscience adherents.” (p. 188).

Munson also makes useful arguments about how beliefs structure a movement. Here, he introduces the concept of “movement streams,” (i.e., “collections of organizations and activists that share an understanding of the best means to achieve the goal of ending abortion” p. 98-99). Munson identifies four streams in the pro-life movement defined primarily by distinct strategic preferences: politics, direct action, individual outreach, and public outreach. His point is that mobilization occurs within a specific stream, rather than within a general movement. And because those streams are relatively insulated from each other (i.e., activists seldom switch streams once they have been mobilized), the initial stream into which activists are mobilized has important consequences for the trajectory of their movement participation. At the level of movement structure, streams also have important implications for movement dynamics and trajectories.

As a reader, I found myself questioning the arguments and evidence very carefully, as is naturally the case when one is faced with challenges to conventional wisdom and substantial research. Munson’s comparison of activists and non-activists confronts its own design problem (dually noted by the author) as his snowball sampling procedure (in which non-activists were identified through activists) is likely to have artificially diminished differences in beliefs between the two groups, and thereby diminished the chance that beliefs might emerge as an explanatory variable. Moreover, I wondered if the observed level of belief transformation was exaggerated by the adoption of a narrow and exclusive definition of pro-life beliefs (i.e., “abortion is always wrong”) which characterized activists. Non-activists, in contrast, were characterized as having “thin” or “loose” belief systems which he suggests cannot properly be called pro-life. However, many of the caveats and inconsistencies observed in the beliefs of non-activists might be interpreted not simply as the uncertainties and confusions of people with undeveloped belief systems, but the hesitations of people who are deeply ambivalent about a complex issue. All of these definitional and methodological issues might have had the effect of overestimating the level and nature of belief transformation, and diminishing beliefs as an explanation for activism.

I bring up those issues not to suggest that there are fatal flaws in the research; all choices regarding research design and conceptual definitions have their own strengths and weaknesses. Rather, I bring them up to illustrate just a few of the many ways that the book forced me to question unreflective assumptions and think more deeply about the roles that beliefs play in the process of mobilization. It is that forced confrontation with taken for granted assumptions that
makes the book a valuable and engaging read. I would add that it is written in an accessible manner, making it well suited to undergraduate and graduate courses on social movements. Finally, while I have focused my attention on issues most relevant to the field of social movements, it also presents arguments that will be of substantial interest to those studying the sociology of religion, as well as debates over civil society.


Jean Van Delinder
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Women’s participation in social movements is typically tempered by the demands of their unpaid work in the household, even though their activism is often explained in terms of an extension of their domestic roles as wives and mothers. Examining women’s activism in the context of socialist and nationalist revolutions in Mozambique and Nicaragua forces us to confront the inadequacies of Western feminist discourse in explaining the complexities of third-world women. Though the Marxist rhetoric of these socialist revolutions of the 1970s and 1980s seemingly embraced women’s emancipation, it did so without engaging in an explicit feminist discourse. As Disney points out, characterizing all women’s activism as explicitly feminist ignores the gendered nature of colonialism, development and racialization of indigenous peoples.

The strength of this comparative analysis is that Mozambique and Nicaragua provide a means to distinguish between discourse and action, or what Disney describes as the disparity between women’s activism and feminist agency. Both countries had to contend with similar colonial legacies including; a centralized, hierarchical, and militaristic political state, close ties to the Catholic Church and its restrictions on reproductive rights, mistreatment and racialization of the indigenous population, and the labor exploitation of an agrarian export led economy. The convergence of these structural factors meant few opportunities were possible for grassroots mobilization in terms of women’s activism and the eventual development of feminist agency. In particular, Disney points out the ways in which Marxism-Leninism facilitates women’s economic emancipation or productive labor while sustaining the limiting aspects of their nonproductive labor. As socialist and nationalist revolutionary movements, both Mozambique and Nicaragua embraced women’s full economic participation but neglected their political participation. Though one outcome of these revolutionary struggles was that women were acknowledged as capable of assuming occupations previously thought of as being only performed by men, such as fighting in the military, these revolutionary movements perpetuated past colonial patriarchal power relations by assuming that women’s emancipation was tied to and limited by their reproductive roles.

The establishment of women’s revolutionary organizations such as Organization of Mozambican Women (OMM) in Mozambique and Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMNLAE) in Nicaragua were actually largely male led, focusing on the struggle for socialism rather than their common struggle as women. The inclusion of women in these revolutionary movements was strategic in order to gain legitimacy with the populace rather than to purposefully emancipate women or develop a feminist consciousness. These movements focused on women’s participation to alter the existing political structure and their activism was channeled to sustain rather than eliminate patriarchal structures of authority. As women became more politically involved their domestic duties remained largely untouched as men were unlikely to take on women’s domestic roles or acknowledge their legitimacy equal to paid labor.

Despite differences between the post-revolutionary periods, both Mozambique and Nicaragua constructed similar conceptions of feminism. Their mobilization was a reaction to limitations placed on their access to civil society due to repressive postcolonialist political regimes that sustained a patriarchal orientation towards women’s emancipation. Further fueling their activism was challenging Catholicism’s control over their reproductive decisions. Finally, the contour of women’s emancipation was shaped by the day-to-day harsh realities of poverty, inadequate health care, lack of reproductive rights and violence.

This raises two important points that Disney’s book addresses regarding ambivalence toward feminism in the developing world. First, though neither Marxist revolution was particularly emancipatory in terms of altering the sexual division of labor, they did facilitate for some women a feminist praxis and rising consciousness about women’s potential for political activism. In Nicaragua, where women’s activism emerged earlier, the autonomous space for women’s activism was shaped by competing organizations dealing with a number of related factors. This created an opportunity for a gendered discourse about women’s emancipation.
The adoption of an overt, feminist discourse was also improbable, if not impossible, in Mozambique, where women’s push for autonomy did not emerge until the 1990s. Another limitation on the women’s movement there is the fact that OMM was the only women’s organization to emerge during the revolutionary period, limiting the development of oppositional gendered discourses to materialize.

The second point in the developing world’s ambivalence toward feminism is the interrelationship between types of oppression—that women are so bound up in surviving and dealing with the difficulties of their lives that they are not able to see themselves as feminists, nor see women’s issues beyond economic and material needs. Focusing on social movements obscures women’s pragmatic activism and deemphasizes their agency. This disconnect between feminist theories and the everyday lived experiences of women is not a new critique, but Disney’s book provides new insights into how the experiences of women in developing countries can lead to women’s activism and the creation of a feminist consciousness.

Disney’s book will obviously be of interest to social movement scholars, particularly those interested in the connection between praxis and activism as well as the complexities of how activism facilitates development of a feminist consciousness in development countries. Her research also provides a much needed review of the relationship between the power dynamics embedded in the collapse of colonialism and how they seem to facilitate replacement regimes that are similarly politically repressive. Though the level of detail is interesting, it does sometimes get in the way of Disney’s narrative and main theoretical thrust of the book. One point that is somewhat obscured here is the contradictory role of the United States in supporting and sustaining undemocratic regimes in Nicaragua. This is a fascinating point and a relevant reminder of America’s somewhat overlooked role as a colonizing power in the contemporary era.


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Kathleen Bruhn presents an interesting and persuasive analysis of why social movement organizations (SMOs) in two large metropolitan areas, Mexico City, Mexico, and Sao Paolo, Brazil (with Brasilia, Brazil, included as a control case), vary in organized protest activity over a recent ten-plus years period. Bruhn draws on political science, sociology, and social movements theories to frame the analysis, but her answer to the question of why protest rates vary from SMO to SMO is focused narrowly on organizational resources, organizational identity, and how organizations respond (or fail to respond) to political opportunities as they arise. Rooted in quantitative analyses of protest event records (coded from multiple major newspapers in each city) and qualitative data (primarily interviews and organization documents), Bruhn’s findings both reinforce existing understandings and challenge conventional wisdoms and established theories.

Bruhn finds that the best predictor of more regular SMO protest activity is a given organization’s history of protest. Groups that protest at one point in time tend to continue doing so because, for those groups, protest represents “a rational and intelligent mechanism for improving the odds of group survival” (p. 162). Organizational resources, group identity, and, to a limited extent, responses to opportunities help explain why a tendency to protest may be sustained over time. Union-affiliated SMOs, she argues, protest more regularly because they tend to have more stable resources and face limited penalties for not cooperating with political parties and actors. In contrast, urban popular movements (Bruhn’s analysis concentrates primarily on unions versus urban popular SMOs) face perpetual resource scarcities that often force them to ally with political parties, alliances that can make the act of protest more costly. More active groups share several other tendencies: (1) they tend to have leftist identities; (2) they regularly compete for member support (versus competing leaders or groups); (3) they have rank-and-file members whose original motive to join included a positive view of protest; (4) they manifest a group culture for which protest represents a regular process by which leaders are chosen through their demonstrated skills.

In contrast to organizational resources and group identities, political opportunity factors play less of a role than expected. Bruhn finds only limited evidence that those SMOs that protest more regularly do so in response to moments of opportunity. She did find evidence that opportunity is perceived and interpreted by SMO actors in ways much more nuanced than might be expected. For example, SMOs allied to parties holding political power encounter opportunities for both negotiation and protest. Furthermore, expected outcomes may vary within a single political administration, regardless of whether an SMO is allied to that administration or not.
Bruhn’s most intriguing conclusion might be that the first year in office for new political administrations does not always offer the honeymoons from protests by allied SMOs, as conventional wisdom might dictate. Rather, under certain circumstances, for example where agendas remain in flux, early years can represent opportunities for allies to engage in protest activities.

Bruhn’s analyses are well-grounded methodologically. Her arguments are built on an impressive volume of empirical data. Anyone who has ever coded newspaper sources for instances of protest events will, like me, marvel at the time periods covered and the number of newspapers used. Appropriately, chapter includes a detailed discussion of the operationalization of the term “protest event” and other key indicators derived from the news articles. The book also has an appendix that outlines some of the potential problems of media selection bias and how she has taken steps to limit the effect of these on her findings. Furthermore, in drawing on both quantitative and qualitative analytical strategies, Bruhn is able to better explain some of the unexpected or contradictory findings than she would have been able to had the entire analysis been based only on quantitative modeling.

There remain a couple of methodological elements that this book might have addressed more thoroughly, though these do not undermine its overall usefulness. First, despite the discussion of how events were defined and potential coverage biases were considered, the reader is given no sense of what types of events are left out of these data (a particularly intractable problem for any researcher, to be sure). For instance, in any coding of news articles for protest events, one will periodically run into reports where an event clearly occurred but for which fundamental details like time and place are either vague or omitted. Were these events included in the data or discarded, and why? Also, Bruhn uses a one year sample (2003) of events identified from articles in the Factiva database to assess coder error, and found several Factiva-reported events that had not been reported in any of Bruhn’s primary sources. Did those Factiva-only events share the same collective characteristics as Bruhn’s newspaper events? It seems that at least some small amount of understanding of events not covered by the newspapers could be derived from closer analysis of these.

Second, while Bruhn’s book is very strong on defining variables clearly, how the quantitative data analysis is structured and carried out needs additional elaboration. That the unit of analysis for the regression models is the “organization year,” the number of protests organized by a particular organization in a given year of the study, is mentioned only briefly but warrants a section of explanation unto itself in chapter two. The same is true for Bruhn’s use of a negative binomial regression strategy to model the relationships in question. While the book can be read by anyone with a basic amount of sociological training, those with a more quantitative orientation are likely to be a least a little bit frustrated by the difficulty of finding these details in the book and the absence of more detailed explanation as to how and why these form the basis for the analysis.


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David Featherstone’s book, Resistance, Space, and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks, is about the emergence of networks to resist the globalization of economic activity, especially the control of production by interests in one part of the world through the exploitation of natural resources in another part of the world. Featherstone builds three arguments about these networks. First, counter-global networks depend, at least in part, on subaltern forms of political activity that rely on the involvement of marginalized participants who are often ignored by accounts that emphasize resistance at the level of the nation state. Second, these networks are not recent phenomena, but are grounded in histories that date back for centuries. Third, power in counter-global networks depends on subtle variations in the geographic locations of activity within nationstates. These arguments illuminate the geographically stretched places across which “subaltern political activity brings into contestation, reworks, and generates geographies of power” (p.7).

Featherstone supports his argument with case studies of explicitly transnational movements against globalized economic activity. One case is resistance to eighteenth-century Atlantic commerce by the “Whiteboys,” a secret society of Irish nationals determined to resist the re-definition of spatial relationships in agriculture, especially as brought about by the enclosure movement. Featherstone demonstrates that the role of the Whiteboys extended beyond Ireland, through solidarities with workers throughout the Atlantic, such as London dockworkers, recent immigrants to Newfoundland, and sailors working...
below the decks of British ships. Irish identities contributed to constructing networks among these workers that passed on repertoires for collective action, such as oath taking in secret societies. This case illustrates the close association between ethnic solidarities and the constitution of networks. Thus, rather than being separate, these aspects of collective action are coproduced.

Featherstone examines the making of spatial practices in the London Corresponding Society (LCS) as a second eighteenth-century case. The LCS was a geographically dispersed reform organization created to further the causes of annual parliaments and universal manhood suffrage. It was a socially heterogeneous organization that brought together gentlemen and subaltern activists alike, but excluded women. By gathering a heterogeneous group drawn from multiple, overlapping networks, the LCS stimulated changes in thinking about contemporary issues. For example, the LCS became a place that enabled the coming together of former slaves and London activists, which engendered empathy for slaves and helped to transform thinking about slavery. This case suggests that the nature of transnational networks depend, in part, on the contested participation of activists in those networks.

In the final section of the book, Featherstone moves beyond the eighteenth-century to investigate the making of contemporary networks to oppose neoliberal globalization. The scope of his discussion speaks to diverse contemporary mobilizations, such as the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle (the so-called “Battle of Seattle”), the dock strikes of the Industrial Workers of the World, and the armed struggle of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. He argues that these networks should not be thought of as a unified, undifferentiated multitude opposed to globalization but, rather, as products of spatially variegated struggles among individuals who are confronting resource and power inequalities. Featherstone draws upon original evidence from the case of the Inter-Continental Caravan, which contested neoliberal institutions and technology in India. The Caravan was created to oppose top-down approaches to resisting globalization. However, the Caravan contained significant geographic disparities and contested power relations within it. While international activists tended to think of the Indian activists as an undifferentiated multitude, they varied in their access to the internet, in their professional backgrounds, and in their regions of origin. These factors led some activists to contest the sites of grievance proposed by the Caravan, and the gender biases of the Caravan leadership itself. This case suggests that an anti-neoliberal opposition may not be assembled as unproblematically as some scholars have assumed, and may play a role in the transformation of political identities.

Despite the usefulness of this work in theorizing how subaltern networks emerge, its argument could have been strengthened substantially by discussing the research design more explicitly. Featherstone presents several case studies from the eighteenth century, and several from contemporary times, but there is no discussion of how these cases were selected or how that selection affected the conclusions of the research. For example, to what extent was the construction of Atlantic trade networks similar to trade in the Indian Ocean, where Muslim identities shaped politics differently than did Irish-national identities? How was contestation of the Caravan in India dependent on this nation’s peculiar history of democratic practices and non-violent movements? Might processes of contestation differ for the Zapatistas? Without some explanation of these choices and their implications, the reader is left with the (perhaps incorrect) impression that case selection was determined solely on the basis of convenient access to archival materials.

The text faces notable limitations with a writing style that may make it inaccessible to nonspecialists in the field. The prose is heavily jargon-laden and is challenging to penetrate in numerous places. The author could have provided more background to discussions of theoretical and academic debates in the field. While these limitations should not discourage researchers from approaching the volume, I recommend that teachers avoid assigning this text in courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Despite these criticisms, Featherstone’s book contributes to our understanding of the formation of counter-global networks. He shows that transnational networks are not void of place. Rather, they are channels through which activists attempt to negotiate political identities and alliances. Yes, national boundaries are traversed by counter-global networks, yet political activities are still shaped by the physical places in which they occur. This book provides a good starting point for scholars who seek an understanding what happens to networks when subaltern relationships are spread across the globe.