**New Social Movements E Special Issue**

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**Social Movements, Collective Action and Activism**

*Introduction*

Collective action and oppositional political activism are firmly established features of any society and pose a challenge to inequality, exclusion and injustice rooted in the oppression of people. Oppressive practices and exclusionary policies are often the catalyst for participation in collective action to generate a conscious move towards social, cultural and political change. Over 100 years ago the suffragette movement in the UK and the nationalist movement in India employed peaceful tactics (viewed as law breaking) with spectacular outcomes and impact which could not have been foreseen. To acknowledge the history of movements globally is crucial in the understanding of new social movements which is the focus of this special issue.

Viewed from the perspective of political sociology, the range of interests of social movements is reflected in the articles published in *Sociology* since the 1960s to the second decade of the twenty first century, with terms such as ‘collective action’, ‘networks’ , ‘democracy’, ‘power’, ‘resistance’, and ‘citizenship’ in their titles. Furthermore, the concept ‘social movements’ has been applied to new areas such as education, for example in the article by Mirza and Reay (2000, included in our collection) which considers supplementary schools as a new social movement. This requires us to reconsider or rethink social movement theory commensurate with contemporary collective action (Ryan 2006, included in our collection). Indeed, a range of theories has been developed over time to understand the rise of social movements and their achievements. This special issue brings together a range of articles with particular ideas about social movements that have developed over a number of decades.

*Trends and Trajectories in Social Movements, Collective Action and Activism*

*Sociology* was launched in January 1967. The first article in the publication was by Joseph Ambrose Banks and discussed the patterns and trajectories of research undertaken within the British Sociological Association (BSA) in its first fifteen years, after the organization launched in 1951. He made no mention or reference to social movements, collective action or activism in this discussion. This is a surprising omission for three reasons. First, social movements were a key feature in Banks’ own research – as noted by his monograph, *The Sociology of Social Movements* (1972)*,* published just five years later. Of note, this book broke from structural-functional ways of understanding social movements and viewed social movements as ‘social technologies’ to create social change (Banks 1972). Second, the article came in the midst of a range of uprisings emanating from civil rights and anti-Vietnam war protests (McAdam 1988) and by May 1968 this energy for social change would spread into Europe (Touraine 1971). Third, at the time of the launch of the BSA, Herbert Blumer was developing his Collective Behavior thesis (1951) which changed the view of a protest from something of a ‘mob’ (see Le Bon 1892 [2008]) to something which ‘should be understood as purposive, meaningful and potentially creative’ (Chesters and Welsh 2011: 5).

Of further surprise is that the first output that centrally discussed ‘social movements’ (as designated by the title) was Jessop’s (1974) review article that discussed Wilson’s *Introduction to Social Movements* text seven years later. Indeed, the first research article in *Sociology* that made the study of social movements central did not arrive until a further three years had passed, with Levitas’ (1977) work on the Christian Socialist movement which pointed out that the aims of social movements may be flexible and in fact, in many cases, only emerging after the emergence of the movement. We include this piece in our collection.

In this article, Levitas laid down two challenges: to pick up the study of social movements in British Sociology, given that the sub-disciplinary field had been dominated by North American scholars and in doing so, to empirically guide away from focussing on the concrete aims of the movements. In fact, rather than principally looking to the outcomes of movements, Levitas encouraged scholars to look at its ‘dialectual processes whereby a problem is defined simultaneously with a solution’ (Levitas 1977: 62). In making this point, her work was immediately located within the emerging European trend of culturally – rather than, as in North America, structurally – analysing activism in a way which was becoming known as the new social movements approach to the area.

It was not that, as with a number of North American studies, research being published in *Sociology* was being referred to as ‘collective action’ rather than ‘social movements’. In fact, the first piece of original research centrally drawing upon ‘collective action’ was offered by Lash and Urry in 1984, seventeen years into the journal’s lifecycle. This piece, also included in our collection, made a conscious effort to critically engage with another North American current in social movement research – that of rational choice/rational actor theory – which placed a large emphasis on individual action rather than the structurally-determined action that Levitas critiqued. As such, Lash and Urry argued for a new theoretical position in Western sociology, which they called ‘game-theoretic Marxism’ which preserved a focus of collective and individual agency as a primary form of causation for such action to produce a framework which took into account ‘class’ (broadly read as access to resources) positions in pushing for social change. The explicit renewal of interest in class position in social movements marked Lash and Urry’s work to be quite different from the culturally-determined analyses of activism that Levitas’ article connected with.

*Theoretical Advances and Developments*

The study of social movements, collective action and activism is no longer rooted within a singular theoretical position. Eyerman’s (1984) work, included in our collection, carries a flavour of some of the debates in this area that shaped British sociological approaches to research in the field (see also Cleland et. al 2018). However, in brief, following on from Le Bon’s (1985 [2008]) ‘crowd’ theory and Blumer’s (1951) symbolic interactionist approaches, other schools of thought across the discipline included rational action theory (see Coleman 1973; Gamson 1990 [1975]; Olson 1968), resource mobilization (see McCarthy and Zald 1977) and political processes (see McAdam 1982; 1986; 1988; Tilly 2009) theories in the study of mobilization.

More recent debates have followed within a European tradition of exploring social movements from a cultural position with grievances that could be caused by lifestyle injustices rather than those that are automatically materially-rooted. This theoretical trend became known as ‘new social movement’ (NSM) theory. This set of ideas, was characterised by Castells (2004 [1997]), Offe (1985), Habermas (1981), Touraine (1977; 1981) and Melucci (1995) and found resonance within empirical studies found in *Sociology.* For Scott (1990: 26) NSMs tend to be linked to a single broad theme or interest – such as peace, the environment or inequalities related to gender, ethnicity or sexuality - rather than the interests of the working classes. As such NSMs are not conceived to develop any notion of total politics, or to subsume politics under a single focus and by the same token, they avoid 'political reductionism' (Melucci 1996) that may 'bypass the state' (Offe 1985). In other words, activists seek change by lobbying social spheres of society rather than the obvious political spheres of governments. As such, NSM theory indicates a departure from the Marxist analysis of mass movements and replaced it with post Marxism and poststructuralism to put forward the idea of a ‘new ‘radical’ democracy which uses identity politics.

Although social movements are difficult to define given the range of phenomena associated with them, it is possible to draw out some features. They involve political and collective action, resistance to oppression, and have a network. In the literature on social movements, there are many arguments regarding their purpose, boundaries and objectives. These movements are mostly associated with oppositional ‘left wing’ activism and contentious politics, however, the same strategies have also been observed amongst right wing groups (see McVeigh 2009). In the pages of *Sociology,* NSM ideas and theories have been used to understand wide ranging issues relating to: anti-Nuclear protests (Joppke 1992, included in our collection), free computer software that disrupts capitalist interests (Alleyne 2011, included in our collection), ‘distinction’ in the anti-capitalist movements (Ibrahim 2011, included in our collection), student political worlds (Crossley and Ibrahim 2012, included in our collection), the concerns of the National Union of Teachers (Edwards 2008, included in our collection) and football fans’ mobilizations against prevailing conditions in the sport (Hill et. al 2016; Millward 2012).

Research giving rise to new social movement theory has often failed to include social class in its analysis, something which is not lost on a range of writers who point to the exclusion of class which denies discussion about the impact of capitalism, globalization and de-industrialization on ‘poor’ people i.e. the 99% (Davis, 2016; Carter, 2011; Dorling, 2015).

*Case Example Areas: Sexuality, Gender and Ethnicity*

Three key sociological touchstones of sexuality, gender and ethnicity provide areas we discuss to elucidate the above debates. 2017 marked the 50 year anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales. LGBTIQ movements are covered in this e-collection with articles by Richardson (1998) and Binnie and Klesse (2013). In her article, Richardson discusses that the concept of 'citizenship' has given insufficient attention to either gender or sexuality. Instead she argues that claims to citizenship status are paralleled with the institutionalisation of heterosexual, male privilege. There is a 'sexualisation of citizenship'. As such, she points out that the relationship between sexuality and citizenship excludes lesbians and gay men, calling for greater consideration of other sexualities, including 'different heterosexualities' (Richardson 1998: 96). Richardson continued to develop these ideas from this important paper, and was the winner of the 2018 Sociology SAGE Prize for Innovation and Excellence for work in this field which included her 2017 article 'Rethinking Sexual Citizenship' (Richardson 2017a) in *Sociology* and her monograph from the same year, *Sexuality and Citizenship* (Richardson 2017b). Our second featured article discussing LGBTIQ movements and rights comes from Binnie and Klesse (2013). They discuss that age, temporality and intergenerationality have often been neglected in debates on intersectionality within sexuality studies. Binnie and Klesse fill this lacuna by exploring how age and generation operate within transnational activism around LGBTIQ communities. To make these claims they draw upon narrative interviews held with activists in Poland, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK. They find that age and generation are highly significant aspects in the way activists relationally position themselves to both each other and the available archives that document those in the wider movement's political experiences and discursive repertoires.

Challenges to the ways in which women have been marginalised are documented in this special e-edition through articles by Bouchier (1979) and Somerville (1997). In his article, Bouchier suggests that the radical feminist movement emerged in the late 1960s United States, as a response to liberal feminist organizations blocking out radical ideas. This meant it became a marginalized set of ideas in the theoretical development of the whole movement. Bouchier centralises the argument that modern social movements, such as the feminist movement, that make demands to change society must, in forming its ideas and programmes, excite potential activists by holding a utopian vision. Thus, he offers that the suppression of feminism's radical wing had an unintended consequence of eliminating the movement's major emotional resource for its development - the ability to excite - and therefore seriously weaken the movement as a force for social transformation. Somerville also uses the women's movement as a means to debate with and to make broader theoretical claims about NSMs and social movement theories in the UK. Her piece acknowledges that British research on social movements had, at that point, been typically criticised in North American studies for making too little reference to dominant theoretical trends in its research on mobilizations. In particular, she notes that the term 'social movement' had often been used as a mere descriptor of a protest group rather than a conceptual tool for analysis. In particular, she argued that this blind-spot, left assumptions about the relationships between the aims, organization and activity of social movements uncritically questioned. In her article, Somerville integrates both theoretical and empirical analyses of women's movements in the United States and the UK. By undertaking this research, she suggests that resource mobilization and post-Marxist social movement scholars in North America tend to recognise the autonomy of politicised culture. In doing this, she calls for British research into collective action to follow theoretical influences from North America and move away from European notions of NSMs seeing `identity' as the basis for grounding political behaviour.

Third is the issue of ethnicity. In this area, Mirza and Reay (2000) looked at how the concept ‘social movements’ has been applied innovatively to capture the role black women have played in the setting up of supplementary schools. Mirza and Reay refer to this issue as a covert social movement to bring about educational change, something which is radical and subversive in its response to exclusion. Through the narratives of the women interviewed, it is apparent that educational ‘desire’ and aspirations in minority ethnic communities exist. The schools are organic grassroots inclusive organizations with a diverse intake. The authors reject rational choice theory for its individualism and resource mobilization theory for its institutionalized resistance to oppressive policies. Education is political and as a site for collective action has been often overlooked, and the authors convey a sense of urgency around what it is to be human, educated, have political agency and be part of a working class community. Collective identities based on ‘race’ and class are evident throughout – they challenge individualism, whiteness, and pathologization of the black community to facilitate social change and develop social capital. The authors are cognisant of the accusation of segregation stating that these spaces are important for blackness as a positive social identity. The dangers of attributing the quiet transformation to feminine qualities, a positive assessment of child-centred pedagogy and investment in meritocracy are acknowledged, instead the authors point to supplementary schools as a response to racism.

*Emotions in the Empirical Landscapes and the Changing Shape of Collective Action*

An important cultural turn in the study of collective action and activism was the turn to focus on the emotions that encourage, maintain and end participations in protest activities. This turn saw emotions as the product of interaction - as modes of expressions of communication within relationships and interdependencies rather than inner processes (Burkitt 2005). The role of the emotions in protests was evident in some of the earliest theorizations of collective behavior, such as in the work of Le Bon (2008 [1895]) and Blumer (1951), but it was alluded to rather than meaningfully analyzed and generally ‘denigrated’ in the belief that ‘one could be “gripped” or “seized”’ by them (Chesters and Welsh 2011: 71). Emotions were, above all else, assumed to be ‘irrational’ (Chesters and Welsh 2011: 71), and this belief continued through ‘Rational Actor Theory’, ‘Resource Mobilization’ and ‘Political Process’ trends in the theorization of collective action. A key breakthrough in the turn to emotions as a focus for social movement research came from Jasper (1997) in his comparative study of protests associated with both pro-animal rights groups (emerging from Jasper and Nelkin 1992) and anti-nuclear power groups (see Jasper 1990). In doing so, he shows that emotions are a part of a culture that allows humans to adapt to the world around them, process information and interact with others. Jasper (1997) states that social life is filled with a range of emotions which often cannot be separated from cognitive beliefs and moral values. Although there may be a range of stimuli that develop the emotions that stir people into protesting, Jasper (1997) argues that attachments to a ‘place’, grounded in the need for ontological security, and the ‘threat’ of losing some dimension of that ‘place’ can motivate a collective to work together to mobilize as a protest. Emotions effectively make movements ‘move’.

In the pages of *Sociology* (and included in our collection)*,* Crossley (1999) usefully adds the term 'working utopia' to the literature on social movements that explore issues of the role of affective and emotion on activism. Using the case example of the radical mental health movement, Crossley says that ‘working utopias’ are the places and spaces where members can visit in order to ‘top up’ their emotional energies and beliefs in the movement’s aims. He considers that such affective renewal provides the necessary 'illusio', or the avoidance of disillusionment, that is needed for continued action. It is in working utopias that a social movement’s culture is reformed/reproduced and that ‘people visit them in order to learn how to practice differently; how to perceive, think and act’ in relation to other members of the community (Crossley 1999: 817). In offering this contribution, Crossley makes four points we consider to be key regarding working utopias and emotions in social movements. First, those who visit working utopias use the material and sets of 'knowledge' generated through interactions in such spaces as resources to persuade others to follow their views. As such, it is in such places that people might be 'converted' from a position where s/he 'agrees' with a movement to being emotionally invested in action. Second, communion in working utopias gives rise to commonly shared feelings of affect such as '‘excitement’, ‘stimulation’, ‘enthusiasm’, ‘evangelism’, feeling ‘right’ and having ‘heads blown’ ... [thus] tapping into a deeper level of belief’ (Crossley 1999: 815). Third, Crossley argues (1999: 822) that working utopias are ‘places of pilgrimage, they become meeting grounds for key movement activists and intellectuals, and thus sites of debate and discussion. They lure like-minded activists, concentrating them in situations where they can and will exchange ideas’. As such, working utopias are places where activists feel intellectually satisfied and/or reassured by the continued aims of the mobilization. Fourth, within working utopias as 'places of pilgrimage', people in 'different national movements, with different approaches, policies and tactics were able to exchange views, learning from each other even when they could not agree and borrowing from each other, thus enhancing their discursive and tactical repertoires' (Crossley 1999: 822). In other words, working utopias provide a sense of communion where social capital - a central movement resource - is generated and networks connect (Crossley 1999: 823).

King's article (2006), also featured in this collection, drew more heavily from the sociology of emotions than movement research to demonstrate that emotions and feeling rules in the field of mobilizations can produce both structural and action consequences thus attempting to link movement-generated emotions to protest strategies or movement action repertoires in a systematic way. In particular, her article uses the case of Australian activists and critically engages with the work of Touraine to explore the ways in which activists become emotionally and culturally embedded in the world that they are endeavouring to change. She critically extends Touraine's work with an explicit turn to emotions, offering that counter to Touraine’s normative-cognitive framework of self-reflection, activists reflect through and on their emotions to identify and change the processes through which they participate in, and also challenge, hegemonic constructions of the world.

Ibrahim’s piece on the British anti-capitalist movement (2011) develops Crossley’s (2003) work on the existence of a ‘radical habitus’ towards a differentiation of types in the ‘protest field’. By applying Bourdieu’s theory of practice in his analysis of political distinction, Ibrahim constructs a convincing argument about why and how ideological divisions exist. He refers to them as the anarchist and socialist anti-capitalist habitus that emerged after the ‘Battle of Seattle’ in 1999. Through empirical data collected from activists in both groups in 2005 following the G8 mobilizations, Ibrahim shows how belonging, collective ideology and political history contribute to ideological reproduction and distinctive political repertoires i.e. methods of political protest. Both groups use forms of social, cultural and symbolic capital with the anarchists using direct methods of protest and communicating with similar groups globally. The socialist group uses mass mobilization, campaigns, petitions and is willing to work with other groups and political parties. What the article shows us is that collective political activism exists and it is not simply restricted to the local but is global in its reach. Although protesting will burn out some people, Naomi Klein observed that ‘already, this decentralized, multiheaded swarm of a movement has succeeded in educating and radicalizing a generation of activists around the world’ (Klein 2002: 27-28). The anti-capitalist movement is dealing with an ideology that has seeped into our lives everywhere, and having political distinctions such as anarchy and socialism only works to its advantage. The movement is young but it is reminiscent of the very visible street based mass protests of the 1960s and 1970s which were fighting for equality, justice and formal inclusion in the nation state. This time however the anti-capitalist movement itself is global assisted by communication technology and fighting against poverty and exclusion in a corporate world.

*Laying Down The Gauntlet For Social Change: New Futures in Social Movement Research*

Social media and associated technology have brought into sharp focus, a debate on levels of political participation. Castells (2012) has argued that within the context of participatory democratic societies, opportunities are made available. Yet Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2009) have argued that technological innovation in communication has contributed to its decline and has resulted in a type of on-line rather than ‘real’ activism. Whether social movements are on-line or off-line, or indeed a combination of both, a distinction needs to be made between their impact and outcome. With social transformation as the aim, social movements operate to bring about social change, equality and justice usually through collective action. Take for example the Presidential campaign of Barack Obama who utilised social media and grassroots activism which made an impact on the consciousness of young black people with a favourable outcome, his successful election as President. Not all movements can be said to have a clear outcome, for example Occupy which has had an impact on society’s thinking about corruption and elitism with an unanticipated outcome – the election of President Trump.

More recently the global reach of movements is exemplified by the anti-globalization and Occupy movements, the Arab Spring, and the women’s marches after President Trump’s election. Undoubtedly this recent dimension aided by social media (digital revolution), a newer version of movements has emerged which is a composite of the local and global. The trending worldwide of campaigns such as: #blacklives matter and #MeToo reflect not only the interest in matters of racial injustice and sexual harassment/abuse but show the scale of racism and misogyny worldwide. People’s involvement in such political matters has challenged the perceived apathy or de-politicisation of societies and individuals by a neo-liberal agenda. While Mathers (2014:1064) was critical of such movements, arguing that they exhibit a ‘relative lack of success in delivering radical economic and social reforms’, Davis (2016: 1) comments that movements require ‘a consciousness of the insidious promotion of capitalist individualism’ and a greater understanding of the personal as political and the power of collective agency.

If new social movements are operating in a neo-liberal capitalist milieu, are we simply talking about reforms that can be made easily by those in power without disturbing the ‘status quo’ (Carter 2011)? This is a pessimistic view of the capability of human political agency because ‘we can[not] rely on governments, regardless of who is in power, to do the work that only mass movements can do’ (Davis 2016: 35). However, reformist action by governments is usually assessed on whether or to what extent the demands for social change can be accommodated or seen as beneficial in electoral politics, for example same-sex marriage or green issues.

The work of mass movements has brought about inclusion of different groups such as women through voting rights, African-Americans through civil rights, and an end to Apartheid resulting in the inclusion of black South Africans. These examples illustrate the conditions under which new social movements emerged and how they have dealt with coercive practices of the state to suppress acquisition of global support through a right to demonstrate. We are familiar with movements that are deeply entrenched in the psyche of societies or viewed as having changed the world. They include the student protests of 1968, the civil rights, anti-apartheid, environmental, feminist, anti-nuclear, animal and gay liberation movements. However, the long road to ‘freedom’ and the decision by communities ‘to transform some of the basic economic and political arrangement in our society’ has often been marked not only by police and military brutality but also surveillance, infiltration, and more recently tracking of social media activity and association with terrorism (Vitale 2017:223).

It is clear that like the world in which they operate, the meaning and operations of social movements have not stood still over the half-a-century the journal *Sociology* has been in print. Across the process of putting together this e-special edition introduction we were surprised to find that the first articles to explore social movements in the journal’s pages did not arrive until seven and ten years after its launch. Since then, research on Social Movements, Collective Action and Activism has grown, although perhaps not with the same quantity of articles and outputs dedicated to it in the mainstream American equivalent journals, such as *American Sociological Review.* This represents a live challenge to *Sociology’s* community: namely to continue to develop high quality research on the wide-ranging array of societal areas in which collective action and protest emerge, and in doing so continue to explore new methods for research and people’s varying engagements with such social movements.

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