

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Karl-Dieter Opp**, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*. New York: Routledge, 2009, 448 pp. \$US 45.95 paper (978-0-415-48389-6), \$US 150.00 hardcover (978-0-415-48388-9)

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*Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements* sets out to identify the explanatory power of dominant social movement theories in accounting for political protests. In doing so, the book highlights the implicit and under-theorized links between micro and macro level social movement perspectives, and identifies how they influence one another. Opp argues that current theoretical approaches should be integrated to gain a better understanding of protest actions and movement outcomes, and that such integration can be achieved by adopting a structural-cognitive model.

The book begins with a detailed engagement of key social movement concepts, including specifying what is meant by protest, social movements, and collective action. Opp does this to assess the robustness of major theoretical perspectives guiding social movement research and to propose conceptual extensions to overcome their weaknesses. The analysis engages resource mobilization, political opportunity, collective identity, framing, and dynamics of contention perspectives. He concludes that these theories are generally substantively strong and identify important factors needed to explain political protest. However, they are fraught with definitional and conceptual ambiguities and are missing important micro level variables.

Throughout the book, Opp repeatedly returns to how dominant accounts of mobilization try to handle the free rider problem. He identifies it as a key explanatory deficiency and argues that it needs to be definitively resolved in order to determine why particular individuals actively participate in political protests while others remain inactive.

The main argument of the book is that although social movement scholars assert that social psychological theories are necessary for understanding macro phenomenon, they do not systematically or explicitly apply them. As a result, macro explanations are often fraught with uncertainties regarding individual incentives to participate in collective action and thus lack depth. By bridging these explanations with micro theories,

he argues that the necessary conditions to determine action can be specified and so too the circumstances in which different theories are valid.

Using the theory of collective action as the basis of analysis, the book also demonstrates how structural factors influence the motivation of actors involved in protest activities. Drawing on this framework, dominant macro social movement theories are analyzed to explain how changes in structural incentives affect the behavior of individuals. Opp critiques such top-down models to illustrate how behavioral changes in turn affect structural conditions. He integrates macro and micro approaches to better predict how people react to structural conditions.

Opp concludes by presenting what he calls a “structural-cognitive model,” which he argues synthesizes the strengths of resource mobilization, political opportunity, identity, and framing perspectives. He illustrates how these theoretical paradigms can be bridged to clearly identify how structural factors and individual incentives mutually influence one another. This is the greatest strength of the book. What sets his model apart from others is that it attempts to account for external influences at various stages throughout its theoretical framework, allowing for previously unidentified factors to contribute to an event’s explanation. This stands in contrast to additive approaches that incorporate variables *ad hoc* without integrating them into the theoretical design. He also advocates focusing more analysis on subjective variables, such as personal characteristics and perceptions of structural changes.

These insights are illustrated with various examples and five case studies that span a broad array of political contention, including Llano del Beal mining resistance in Spain, the anti-globalization or global justice movement, the landless rural workers movement in Brazil, the American civil rights movement, and the movement for German unification.

On many occasions, Opp brings into question the issues of emergence and spontaneity in political protests. He claims that it is an under-theorized aspect of the social movement literatures and uses it as the basis for promoting his structural-cognitive approach. However, in making such claims he does not engage earlier perspectives dealing with collective behaviour and the famous debate between Lewis M. Killian and Aldon Morris. Greater attention to this literature may have provided richer analysis and a more nuanced foundation for his conclusions.

Although the book attempts to present material in accessible language and covers a broad range of theories, it is best suited for specialists in the area or graduate students. It could be an ideal resource for developing courses in social movements because of its systematic and de-

tailed analysis of theories. It is also a solid foundation for deconstructing social movement perspectives.

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