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REVIEW OF COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES, MOBILIZING STRUCTURES AND CULTURAL FINDINGS

Robert Kleidman, *Cleveland State University*

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Reviewer: ROBERT KLEIDMAN, Cleveland State University

This book is a successful attempt by the editors and authors, leading theorists in the social movement field, to assess and further the growing field of comparative analysis of social movements. In the introduction, the editors identify an emerging consensus on the importance of three broad sets of factors in shaping the rise and form of social movements: political opportunity, mobilizing structures, and framing. They carefully examine what is known about each factor, their interactions and effects, and the unique contribution of comparative research to illuminating these issues. The book is then organized in three sections corresponding to the three factors.

Most impressive is the intellectual dialogue throughout the book. The themes and issues identified in the Introduction carry through the book, with many authors explicitly engaging the editors and each other on particular issues. More than most edited volumes, this is a coherent work.

Doug McAdam introduces the first section by defining and analyzing political opportunity, exploring relevant dependent variables, and suggesting future

directions for research. Sidney Tarrow calls for a “dynamic statism” that recognizes the importance of states and the reciprocal interaction of states and movements. Both chapters are wide-ranging, intelligent discussions that review the literature and seek to move it forward. Chapters by Donatella Della Porta on protest policing, Anthony Oberschall on the 1989 Eastern European revolutions, and Elena Zdravomyslova on the “political cycle” of reforms in the U.S.S.R. illuminate different aspects of opportunity.

John McCarthy begins the second section with a call for more identification and description of the range of formal and informal mobilizing structures at different times and in different places. He then thoughtfully weaves together themes from the four chapters in this section, exploring how specific mobilizing structures might emerge from both political opportunities and framing efforts. Hanspeter Kriesi analyzes the influence of external and internal factors on development of new social movement organizations in four European nations. Dieter Rucht’s comparison of women’s and environmental movements in three countries shows how movement structures tend to adapt to political structures. Both chapters develop complex models that begin to identify important tendencies and patterns without oversimplifying. Elizabeth Clemens and Kim Voss add important case studies of relations between organization, opportunity, and framing.

Introducing the third section, Mayer Zald places the recent rise of cultural analysis in social movement theory within a broader history of the study of culture and meaning. He follows this with an enlightening discussion of current theory and possible future directions. William Gamson and David S. Meyer typologize political opportunity and discuss how movement actors frame opportunity. McCarthy, Jackie Smith, and Zald develop a useful distinction between four aspects of the issue agenda and explore how movements may influence each. Bert Klandermans and Sjoerd Goslinga examine recent struggles over disability allowance in the Netherlands, showing how public debates over specific policies are often grounded in conflicting pairs of deeply held value, such as self-reliance vs. mutuality. McAdam’s discussion of tactics in the civil rights movement argues convincingly that framing contests involve not just talk, but action.

I have a few general critiques. Some of the typologies and theories presented are overly formal and abstract. While they identify important dimensions, they often fail to generate much explanatory power, and they connect only tenuously with the relevant empirical studies. An impressive alternative is Kim Voss’s chapter on the collapse of the Knights of Labor, which develops a theoretically informed narrative that builds toward a “rich, differentiated” theory. (Alexander L. George, 1979. “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison.” Pp. 43-68 in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, edited by P.G. Lauren. Free Press.) Second, especially in the political opportunity section, explanations tend toward determinist accounts of movements. As some of the authors note, we also need more sustained consideration of what makes some

movements succeed and others fail in recognizing, seizing upon, and expanding opportunities. Ganz's concept of "strategic capacity" is an important contribution in this direction. (Marshall Ganz. N.d. "Resources and Resourcefulness: Leadership, Strategy, and Organization in the Unionization of California Agriculture [1959-66]. Forthcoming in *American Journal of Sociology*.) Finally, many of the authors could present their findings in much clearer, simpler language without losing any power in their analyses.

Overall, this volume makes a major contribution to the development of our understanding of social movements and adds to our knowledge of politics, the state, and culture. It can be evaluated as an assessment of current theory and as a programmatic statement, as well as a collection of related contributions. It scores well on all counts.