

Introduction

Rethinking European movements and theory

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European social movements have been central to European history, politics, society, and culture and have had a global reach and impact. Yet, European social movements, and social movement theories, have rarely been taken on their own terms in the English-language literature, but rather as counterpoints to the American experience. While such comparisons have been fruitful in some ways, they have lacked a sense of history and culture and have failed to take European social movement theory seriously on its own terms.

This has been exacerbated by the failure of Anglophone social movement theorists to pay attention to the substantial literatures in languages such as French, German, Spanish or Italian – and by the increasing global dominance of English in the production of news media, and other forms of media such as the Internet. It is also, of course, driven by the demand for public commentary by well-known intellectuals irrespective of their actual research on social movements, and the pressure on them to make vast generalisations based upon limited personal experience and what little they can glean from a media which struggles to report social movement processes adequately.

This magisterial ignorance is particularly problematic because these same movements – from the European eruptions of 1968, east and west, through to the European marches of the unemployed, East European dissidence, British counter-cultural movements or west European autonomous movements in the 1980s and 1990s – have been central to the construction of the “alterglobalization movement”, or global justice movement, which began with alliances between, for example, French ATTAC and Brazilian movement organizations, or between Italian and Spanish radicals and the Zapatistas.

The global justice movement, for its part, has clearly been central in the development and construction of the current wave of global protests. Often the lines of continuity between movements have a markedly national character despite the global nature and impact of mobilizations (e.g. connections between the Spanish experience of the Global Justice Movement and the emergence of the 15-M Indignados movement). Among other things, what is often missing in accounts is the extent to which key European movements represent a continuation of the “New Left” problematic – the experience of a mainly extra-institutional left movement culture in political contexts marked by the

institutionalisation of a more moderate left. As the chapters in this book show, contemporary anti-austerity protests and the European *Indignados*/15-M/“Occupy” protests grow out of this same matrix.

This book sets out to take the European social movement experience seriously on its own terms, including (i) the European tradition of social-movement theorizing, particularly in its attempt to understand the development of movements from the 1960s onwards; (ii) the extent to which European movements between 1968 and 1999 became precursor movements for the contemporary anti-globalization movement; (iii) the construction of the anti-capitalist “movement of movements” within the European setting; and (iv) the new M-15/“Occupy” mobilizations against financial austerity in Iceland, Greece, the UK, Spain, Portugal, and elsewhere.

Overview of this book

In Part I Cox and Flesher Fominaya show the extent to which reflections upon social movements have been constitutive of European social theory, and argues for the latter to be considered more systematically within social movement research. It further shows that the standard rendering of “new social movement” theory reproduced in conventional accounts is more of an origin myth than a serious piece of intellectual history, and examines the actual history of the new social movement debate in order to recover more fruitful lines of enquiry about European movements.

Part II discusses European precursors to the global justice movement. The chapters highlight continuities and disjunctures of movement networks, ideologies, organizing forms and issues in national and transnational European contexts. These case studies and comparative accounts not only provide rich empirical data, but collectively demonstrate the profound differences between configurations of key actors in national expressions of the GJM. As such, these contributions serve as an important corrective to arguments for the radical novelty of the GJM vis-à-vis earlier movements, an insight that can be useful when applied to current analyses of anti-austerity protests.

Osterweil draws our attention to the importance of history and place by tracing the influence of precursor movements, especially autonomous movements, upon the narratives, goals and organizing forms of the Italian Global Justice Movement. At the same time she shows how these place-based movement histories influenced actors, who then influenced and were influenced by other actors in the GJM. In a similar vein, Sommier and Fillieule use a genealogical approach to trace the influence of a diversity of actors upon the emergence of the French anti-globalization movement, demonstrating that most of these actors were organized prior to the emergence of the movement. They show how differences in national political opportunity structures shape the emergence and decline of protest cycles. Their claim that the diversity of actors points to a conceptualization of the GJM as “an amorphous collection of various mobilized groups” rather than a single transnational movement contributes to the ongoing

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1 debate over how best to categorize transnational movements. Rivat shows the
 2 enduring influence of the anti-nuclear movement upon the contemporary Euro-
 3 pean movement landscape and its close relationship with the transnational global
 4 justice movement. His close attention to national variations in relationships
 5 between environmentalist groups and political parties over time also shows the
 6 enduring tension between the more institutional “old” left and the more auto-
 7 nomous and participatory “new” political identities. Membretti and Mudu trace
 8 the historical roots of the Italian *Centri Sociale* (social centres) and their crucial
 9 importance in the development of the dynamics, culture and agenda of the anti-
 10 globalization movement, not only in Italy but in Europe too. *Morena* shows how
 11 the French peasant organization Confederation Paysanne successfully forged a
 12 new alterglobalization collective identity, by drawing on pre-existing popular
 13 representations and adapting them to the new neoliberal critical discourse.
 14 Flesher Fominaya highlights processes of movement culture continuity and
 15 national to transnational diffusion by showing the continuity of five key charac-
 16 teristics of the British anti-roads movement with central features of the GJM.

17 Part III examines the cultural processes involved in constructing the “movement
 18 of movements”. Drawing on research on EuroMayDay and climate justice move-
 19 ments, Scholl discusses processes of cross-national diffusion, arguing for the con-
 20 ceptualization of Europe as a “contagious space”. *Gagyi* uses the method of
 21 tracking political ideas through historical interactions to compare the ways in which
 22 Eastern European activists in Hungary and Romania received and interpreted the
 23 concept and practice of autonomy as it was diffused from Western European global
 24 justice movement actors. Her analysis calls for careful attention to the ways in
 25 which local and national contexts shape the incorporation of key concepts that are
 26 all too often theorized in globalizing universalistic ways. Owens, Katzeff, Lorenzi
 27 and Colin illuminate the processes whereby activist identities are constructed across
 28 space, as activists travel between European squats over time. Their chapter points
 29 our attention to the importance of space and mobility in identity processes and con-
 30 tributes to our understanding of transnational diffusion processes. Daphi adopts a
 31 narrative approach in order to analyse the relation between collective memories and
 32 activists spatial anchoring and collective identity construction in the Global Justice
 33 Movement, by comparing Italian and German accounts.

34 Part IV looks at the new “European Spring” of anti-austerity protests. These
 35 chapters represent emerging research that shows the roots of these events in each
 36 country’s movement history, but also reflects upon the role of transnational net-
 37 works in shaping them.

38 Júlíusson and Helgason draw on Gramsci and Badiou in order to trace the
 39 roots of the Icelandic revolution of 2008 – which prefigured the later wave of
 40 protests from Tunisia to the USA – from the 1930s to 2008. The Icelandic case
 41 was small relative to later mobilizations elsewhere, but very successful and influ-
 42 ential, being the first mobilizations to directly address the consequences of the
 43 global financial crisis. Sergi and Vogliatzoglou show the importance of the
 44 mobilization of national symbolic memory on the repertoires of contention in
 45 the Tunisian and Greek anti-austerity protests. Romanos traces the processes of

collective learning in the Indignados/15-M, highlighting an evolution from and continuity with previous global justice movement networks and mobilizations, as well as noting newer features. In contrast, Calvo draws on empirical survey data on the participants and frames of the 15-M movement, arguing for the novelty of the movement with regard to previous political culture in Spain. Taken together, these two contributions provide us with much food for thought regarding movement continuity and rupture.

The editors' conclusion reflects upon the role of European social movements in the rapidly changing crisis, situating individual anti-austerity and "Occupy" movements and pointing to future avenues for research.

Research context

The 15 chapters of this book include authors based in 11 different countries whose analyses are all grounded in ethnographic and historical research on these movements – in Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Spain and the UK – and, in keeping with the tradition of European social theory, many are active, critical participants in the movements they analyse.

Taken as a whole, the research in this book demonstrates

- 1 The lasting significance of national movement histories, generating *movement landscapes* which are not reducible to political opportunity structures;
- 2 The role of cross-national processes of inspiration, learning, alliance and movement which go substantially beyond "transnational advocacy networks" and constitute Europe as an internally-differentiated movement space;
- 3 The importance of *previous* movement waves and their specific national histories in accounting for the complexities of the present;
- 4 The particularities of European social movement developments, which, while remaining porous to developments elsewhere, nonetheless deserve reflection on their own terms. This suggests the limitations of quantitative cross-national comparative analysis that fails to incorporate findings from qualitative research and overlooks the national and historical specificities of the cases being compared;
- 5 The need for theoretical models which are more attentive both to these *historical* dimensions of movement development, continuity and rupture and to the interplay of national, European and local in the formation of complex, differentiated transnational movement cultures.

It is our hope that a reading of the contributions that follow will stimulate new avenues of research and reflection. As scholars and observers struggle to make sense of the current wave of anti-austerity protests, and protests yet to come, we hope this book will serve as a useful and provocative invitation to a historically grounded debate that balances attention to national specificities with the realities of transnational and global dynamics.