

SOCI 360

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COMMUNITY CHANGE

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Shifting Terrain

1. The problems with general theories forced a turn to "empiricism." (p 236)

- There is a general dissatisfaction with universal models of social movements because assumptions that movements are an automatic response to social conditions, or to generalized beliefs, often prove **not** to be **empirically verified**.
- **Functionalist Theory (CB)** has clearly committed this flaw of over-generalizing;
- **Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT)** has the advantage of engaging in the details of analyzing human interaction, if too closely (misses the forest for the trees);
- **Contentious Politics (CP)** has value in that it engages in 'relational thinking';
- **New Social Movements (NSM)** has the chief insight of the creation of collective identities.

Notes based on: *Social Movements and Protest* by Gemma Edwards, 2014, Cambridge University Press, NY, Chp 9, Conclusion: the shifting terrain of social movements studies.



Shifting Terrain

2. Relational Understanding

"The logic of collective action must not be thought primarily as 'rational' one but a 'relational' one." (p 238)

a. People are not "rational actors" (in the RMT sense).

Networks matter - "interdependent rationalities" need to be the focus: a mix of rational, normative (cultural), emotional, and psychological needs must be met in advancing collective behavior (this greatly complicates the "cost-benefit analysis").

b. The "world around" the movement is equally important to relate to.

Political Process theory (PPT) engages this idea (perhaps overcorrecting for RMT's "internalization"; (p 239). **Maintain focus on "external relational fields"** - a "field" is the symbolic and discursive space in which strategic actions take place between movements and "actors" (individual, state, media, corporation, culture, etc.). (p 240)

c. Understanding of how culture influences people and produces the fertile ground for emotional connection

is an important part of (p 241) relational thinking



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3. Four main conceptual PROBLEMS with current social movements theory:

- a. **The necessity of strains, resources and organization is questionable** (p 242) – CB, RMT, SMO
- b. **The centrality of the state is uncertain** (p 243) – PPT, CP, POS
- c. **The desirability of collective identity may or may not influence movement development** (p 245) – NT, NSM, AGM
- d. **The distinction between collective, organized protest and unorganized, individual protest is unclear** (p 246) – RAT, Relational Theory

