

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Jasper, James M.** *Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2014. 200 pp., \$24.95 paper (9780745655178)

James M. Jasper is a central figure promoting the cultural approach to social movements. *Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements* employs a cultural framework, emphasizing the protest subjects' point of view, characteristics and agency. This book reflects a tendency in contemporary social movement research to recognize culture as an important component of protest movements. Even the structuralist social movement theorist Charles Tilly, in his final work *Contentious Performances* (2008), recognized the importance of culture in protest movements.

The book describes a broad range of diverse social movements starting from Occupy Wall Street and proceeding to LGBTQ movements, animals' rights movements, Dalit liberation movement in India (the struggle of untouchable castes who make up 170 million, for dignity and recognition), and the Egyptian revolution of 2011. The author applies his explanatory model—dominance of cultural component in social movements' emergence, evolution and transformation, and preference of persuasion over violence—to such substantively different phenomena.

Jasper proceeds from an understanding of culture as a field of symbolic tension: it is a field whose main content relates to meanings (cognition), emotions and moral values, rather than material artifacts of civilization. Sharing the approach of the sociology of emotions pioneered by Arlie Hochschild, Jasper argues that we learn how to express emotions in ways accepted by our culture. He also considers morality to be an important component of culture; as he explains, morality is made up of principles and intuitions “that are felt rather than explicitly formulated” (p.8). He argues that “[m]ore people are led into politics by their moral intuitions ... than by their principles” (8).

Jasper provides a brief introduction to social movement history, stressing the importance of the John Wilkes movement in 18<sup>th</sup> century England as a predecessor to modern contentious activism. He then discusses non-cultural approaches to social movements, such as: resource mobilization theory, political opportunity theory, and historical theories.

He explores the shift from more structural perspectives towards the cultural explanatory model that took place in the 1980s.

Unlike rational choice theories or more structural theories inspired by Marxism, the cultural approach recognizes participants of social movements as full subjects with emotions, moral principles, intuitions; not simply rational subjects whose purpose is economic profit, as crowds, or masses of people subject to the determinism of social structure. Jasper emphasizes the importance of cultural meanings for social movements. He discusses different types of physical carriers of meanings like music, visual and performing arts and even human bodies.

As Jasper highlights, a cultural approach to social movements involves the analysis of framing. For example, feminists frame “rape as violence” versus “rape as sex.” He argues that social actors are typically framed as victims, villains or heroes. Jasper also shows what meanings are ascribed to protesters’ actions by protesters themselves, by their opponents and bystanders, and what role emotions play in protest vitality (51).

The central argument of Jasper’s book is that modern contentious movements tend to follow the path of persuasion, not violence. Persuasion involves a symbolic cultural struggle where actors try to impose their values, beliefs and ideas onto their opponents and prove their moral superiority, or at least moral dignity. Their main goal is “to give a name to a social problem: persuading people that sexism, sexual harassment, animal cruelty, racism, institutional racism, child sexual abuse, global injustice, and other problems exist” (175).

The bulk of the book analyzes what Jasper identifies as crucial elements of social movements such as infrastructure, recruiting strategies, organizational sustainability, decision-making, and engaging other players. Jasper pays special attention to the notion of “dilemma” that has been used in social movement literature for a few decades. Dilemmas are the challenges any social movement typically faces, regardless of its content. They have a double-edged nature and require a balance to be maintained between two opposite tasks. Among others, Jasper outlines the “Janus dilemma”: the idea that social movements face difficulty in distributing energy between sustaining internal solidarity and conveying grievances to external audiences effectively to achieve sympathy and support.

Overall, the book is designed as a manual on social movements. Identifying central dimensions, challenges, and problems faced by social movements, Jasper draws on his extensive background as a student and teacher of social movements. His arguments are supported by various mass-media materials and photo documents. Although it is intended

as a textbook, Jasper's work would also be useful for social movement activists as a manual for social movement organization: it helps to identify the most typical problems social activists face and instructs how to take preventive measures. Activists and scholars alike will appreciate the accessibility of the text; the style of the author is vivid and sometimes humorous.

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