

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Törrnblom, Kjell and Ali Kazemi, eds. *Handbook of Social Resource Theory: Theoretical Extensions, Empirical Insights, and Social Applications*. London and New York: Springer, 2012. 470 pp., \$79.99 paper (9781494913527)

This volume provides a useful collection of articles that cover accomplishments and trends in social resource theory (SRT). The largest number of contributing authors are psychologists; a considerably smaller number are in business management and organizational studies and in sociology. The establishment of SRT is attributed to an article published in 1971 by Uriel Foa and a book published in 1974 by he and his wife, Edna Foa. It focused on interpersonal exchanges of resources. The objectives of the present volume are numerous, but they comprise especially (1) a broadening of the number of resources that should be taken into account from the original six outlined by Foa and Foa; (2) integrating SRT with related bodies of literature and other theoretical approaches; (3) expanding the scope of the theory to accommodate other disciplines; and (4) moving beyond the micro level of analysis to the meso and macro levels.

The cast of contributors is impressive, as is the quality of the theorization and the research that are provided in the chapters. As a sociologist I learned a lot and was given much food for thought. Sociologists can appreciate the efforts to extend the theory to include other theories and disciplines. True, some sociologists might complain that this extension has not gone far enough. Indeed, this is what Jonathan Turner does in his chapter in the volume. He argues for the need to bring larger social structures into SRT because interpersonal relations are almost always embedded in these social structures, which determine the resources people have and how they are transacted. He compliments some SRT theorists who have sought to make it more sociological, but in general he is very critical of SRT and the research on which it is based.

In any event, one must applaud any effort to broaden the scope of SRT. Certainly theoretical integration and bridging the micro and the macro are now very much in vogue. Yet, I do think some caution is called for. Is it a good idea to seek to integrate SRT with as many other

theoretical approaches as possible? To demonstrate similarities and linkages among theories is certainly edifying – which in fairness is all that some of the papers try to do – but too much integration can lead to a theoretical monstrosity. This would not be true, of course, if all the theories related to SRT became subsumed by SRT (or one of the other theories), but that is neither likely nor desirable. In any case, monstrous or not, we have had enough of theories (Parsonianism, Marxism, post-modernism) that claim to explain too much. Similarly, there is considerable merit in synchronizing the study of interpersonal relations with that of larger social structures, but there is a danger in extrapolating from one to the other. And, while no one can argue against bringing together different disciplines, in doing so confusion can result from the different meanings that concepts have in different disciplines. I certainly found some terms – including the central concepts of universalism versus particularism, and concrete versus symbolic – being used in ways that are different from the ways in which they are used in the sociological literature with which I am familiar.

I have a special interest in status and one of the things I like about this SRT literature is the attention it gives to status. However, as someone who studies status cross-culturally and mostly at a meso or macro level, I was struck by the number of claims made in this book about status at meso or macro levels that were misleading and in some cases false. One has to be extremely careful if one tries to expand the analysis of interpersonal relations and transactions from one structural level to another. Greater knowledge of theories and research at different levels is also all to the good – and that is the way in which I have appreciated my opportunity to review this book – but a theoretical integration of the two is problematic.

Experimental research is often criticized by other social scientists, especially by sociologists, on the grounds that it does not take place in the “real” world with all its confounding variety. Yes, but that is precisely its utility. In these experiments, researchers are able to control variables by altering the contexts and cultures in which they take place, the characteristics of the participants, the sort of relationships among them, their interactions, and the behaviours elicited. It would be helpful if those engaged in this kind of research provided more discussion of these variables; they could also do more to acknowledge the limitations of interpersonal experiments; and they could resist the temptation to over-extend their findings and propositions. At the same time, it is essential that other social scientists recognize the value of the experimental study of interpersonal behaviour and take it seriously.

For this reason, the greater the number of social scientists who read this volume the better.

University of Western Ontario

Samuel Clark

Samuel Clark is Professor Emeritus at the University of Western Ontario. His publications include *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton University Press 1979); “Nobility, bourgeoisie, and the Industrial Revolution in Belgium” *Past and Present* (1984); *State and Status: The Rise of the State and Aristocratic Power in Western Europe* (McGill-Queen’s University Press 1995); “International competition and the treatment of minorities: seventeenth-century cases and general propositions.” *American Journal of Sociology* (1998); and *Distributing Status: The Evolution of State Honours in Western Europe* (McGill-Queen’s University Press 2016). He is currently looking at generalization in comparative-historical literature.

sclark4@uwo.ca

