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**Social Movement Studies in Britain: No Longer the Poor Relation?**

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Tilly's famous claim that 'Britain created the social movement' (Tilly 1982) might lead readers to assume that scholarship on social movements would be firmly established as a central field of British social science. That is not the case. Or, rather, it is not the case in relation to the dominant approach to studying social movements as it has developed across North America and Europe in recent decades, anchored as it now is around the study of contentious politics, networks, framing and, latterly, emotions. Britain has, of course, produced some of this kind of social movement scholarship, as we will show, but British scholarship on social movements also has a distinctive texture and tradition, born out of the specific cultural, political and academic contexts in which the study of social movements emerged in Britain from the late 1950s, and of the subsequent development of relationships between British social movements and the study of social movements.

Therefore in this chapter we first survey the emergence of social movements and the varieties of scholarship that have developed since they became a focus of interest in the social and human sciences in the 1960s. An underlying theme within these various approaches is the question of national particularity. In parallel to the catalysing effects on the study of social movements of the US civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements and the post-1968 movements in many other Western European countries, the development of social movement scholarship in Britain has been profoundly marked by the specific contours of British movement

activism. Thus British writing on movements has been strongly influenced by the Labour movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), feminism, and most recently, the environmental and global justice movements.

These relationships have strongly influenced not just the subjects of and dominant approaches to social movements in Britain, but even the broad understanding of the objectives of such writing, and its disciplinary locations. Indeed, British sociology, despite the strength of its empirical drive and theoretical pre-occupations with structure and agency, has historically had remarkably little to say about social movements, a point well made by Bagguley, who over fifteen years ago asked why there was ‘no sociology of social movements in Britain’ (1997: 147). Even today, the contrast between the BSA and its European, American and international counterparts is stark; of the forty-four ‘study groups’ established within the British Sociological Association, not one is concerned primarily with social movements. Nor is any of the fifty-one ‘specialist groups’ within the UK Political Studies Association devoted to the study of political protest. Against this backdrop, the account of movement scholarship in Britain that we give here is undeniably partial—both because we cannot hope to be comprehensive, and because it inevitably reflects our own concerns and passions—but through it we attempt to explain the development of a ‘British tradition’ of movement analysis, which is pluri-disciplinary, overwhelmingly qualitative, and driven by concerns with context and movement agency. We discuss the challenges movement scholarship in Britain has faced and faces, and where future developments might lie.

### *History Matters*

Tilly's claim about the invention of the social movement in Britain was based upon his analysis of the changing forms of contentious action between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, marking the emergence of the 'national social movement' (1995a). This happened in other countries too, notably the United States and France, but the British case was uncomplicated by the noise of a revolution, and so the causal elements of the context could be separated out from controversies about the influence of revolutionary events on popular consciousness. Tilly's study showed how by the 1830s new 'repertoires of action' had emerged, in which campaigners formed associations to engage with national political issues and pursue reforms in the political system. His was one of several important studies of nineteenth-century popular contention in Britain by American social scientists, including Steinberg's study of the discourses of Spitalfield Weavers (1995) and Calhoun's arguments that early industrial protest had more to do with defence of community than class consciousness (1982). Both were included along with Tilly in Traugott's important edited collection on *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (1995), a collection that included no contributions from British authors. Where then were the British researchers?

They were in fact writing about the same subjects, but in different ways. Tilly and others in the contentious politics school (perhaps most notably Tarrow) have been much more interested in historical analysis, and resistant to the search for social scientific laws, than most of North American sociology and political science; Tilly in particular is associated with a defence of the importance of context, and the impossibility of developing finite laws about human action (Tilly and Goodin 2006). Yet if the contentious politics approach to social movements is located in particularity and detail, it is equally concerned with an explanatory drive to scale up from this

particularity to produce transferrable models of action. For Tilly and Tarrow, for example, the development of ‘modular’ repertoires is the result of large-scale structural changes across Western societies: if Britain was one of the most modern countries in these respects, it was only one of several, and finally hardly distinguishable from similar processes and transformations elsewhere (Tarrow 1995; Tilly 2004; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). If the school of contentious politics defined itself as seeking a middle ground between phenomenological interpretation and mono-causal structural and rational choice laws of social science, it has nonetheless produced an attempt to codify recurrent, de-contextualised mechanisms and processes, most notably in *Dynamics of Contention* (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001).

In contrast to this search for generalizable mechanisms and processes and causal explanations of action—apparent in the tools and vocabulary of resource mobilization, political opportunity, and repertoires of contention—British movement scholarship has been animated by rather different methodological concerns, and predominantly marked by a drive to scale *down* to the particular. Indeed, in Britain the sociology of social movements has been profoundly marked by its relation to historiography and ethnography. Particularly important is Edward (E. P.) Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), which remains a canonical text for British approaches to writing on social movements. The focus here is not on movements *per se*; rather, in this and other key writings by Thompson (such as *Whigs and Hunters*, 1975) and associated leftist historians, particularly within the Centre for the Study of Social History at the University of Warwick (Hay et al. 1975), the development of political movements of dissenters and radicals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was linked to historiographic concerns with context, agency, culture, and class, explored through the lens of investigation into the forms

of power in the new capitalist political economy and the resistant development of popular solidarities and collective consciousness amongst the ‘common people’.

Thompson was one of the driving figures of what in Britain is known as the ‘first New Left’ (Kenny 1995). An informal group of Marxist academics and intellectuals with a wider grassroots base in New Left clubs and coffee houses, it developed strong ties with the newly formed CND in the late 1950s. Defined by its break with the Communist Party after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the New Left’s importance lies not only in its political analysis but also in the critical historiography that it produced. Most important here is Thompson’s focus on English radicalism, and the claim that indigenous traditions of dissent were rooted in the lived experience of working-class communities, developed through popular struggles independently of the leadership of Marxist intellectuals, an approach reflected in the *History Workshop* journal and movement founded by another New Left historian, Raphael Samuel. Their reading of British radicalism and dissent was rejected by an important strand of the British intellectual left, perhaps most prominently by Tom Nairn and Perry Anderson, editors of the *New Left Review*. Whereas for Thompson pre-modern traditions were a resource for the creation of a sense of popular sovereignty, for his critics the key problem was that the British working class and the Labour Party were too conservative, resisting revolutionary ideas and seeking only incremental reforms rather than confronting capital through a fully developed critique of British state and society.

### ***Movements and Academics***

Why does this now rather archaic argument between Marxists, half a century old, matter for understanding the trajectory of scholarship on social movements in Britain? It matters because in the first New Left we find the first elaboration of many of the enduring (and inter-related) themes

that evolved to become central concerns of British social movement scholarship. These include: a commitment to the importance of understanding the consciousness of activists as agents of social and political change, casting social movements as sites of the generation of critical discourse; a concern with the activist as much as with the movement as the basic unit of analysis; a concomitant primary commitment to highly contextualized qualitative enquiry over broad comparative frameworks, a scholarship ‘from below’ through archive or fieldwork, a location of contentious politics in ‘everyday local practices’ (Chatterton 2010); a focus on working-class organisation and social history (though, as we will argue, more recent developments have broadened the disciplinary scope and movement focus of British scholarship); and, finally, an interest in scholarship as not simply interpreting the world but also effecting social change.

The exploration of grand narratives of social transformation through attention to local micro-histories of dissent and dissenters influenced a generation of historians after Thompson, and remains central to contemporary social historiographies of protest and class formation in the nineteenth century (see Chase 2007 amongst others). As Navickas underlines in a recent overview of British social history, most such studies reject the ‘quantifying approach . . . of “repertoires of protest” that first unsatisfactorily separated types of action that may have been connected, and second unfairly denigrated “pre-industrial” collective action as disorganized and unsophisticated’ (2011: 197). Of course, protest historiography has inevitably expanded beyond a concern with class to other subjects, particularly as second-wave feminism developed in the 1970s. In keeping with qualitative, movement-centred methods, an important aspect of this drive has been the growth of oral history, whose initial push towards ‘empowerment’ —in the words of Paul Thompson, to ‘give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place’ (1978: 3)—has more recently been supplanted by a concern with

advocacy, where practice, the act of recounting personal history, is in itself held to have a transformative potential (Abrams 2010: 169). Though far from uniquely, or even centrally, concerned with public forms of dissent—a key focus of oral history has been the study of the family, women's history, and ethnic minorities—the concern of oral historians with multiple, subaltern voices is nonetheless a significant element within the growing literature addressing the collective memory of struggle through the particular stories and experiences of individual activists (e.g. British Library 2012).

Though the 'new' social movements of feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, peace, environmentalism and anti-racism were central to the sense of a new politics in Britain from the 1970s to the 1990s, as they were in many countries, this did not necessarily entail a rejection of class politics. Indeed, Frank Parkin's seminal study of CND—*Middle Class Radicalism* (1968)—anticipated debates about the character of the 'new social movements' that were in the 1980s to become central to the field (see Taylor and Pritchard 1980), whilst Mattausch (1989) returned to the class character of the revived CND of the 1980s. As Cox and Flesher Fominaya (2013) maintain, the 'new' social movements are often misunderstood in the canonical accounts of the history of social movement thinking as necessarily 'post-Marxist', a position that underplays the enduring influence of the New Left. Vanguard models of party leadership, and hierarchical and patriarchal forms of organization as well as exclusively statist and top-down models of political agency were challenged variously by new green, feminist, autonomist, anarchistic and libertarian movements that committed themselves to experiments in developing less hierarchical modes of grassroots organization (known in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s as 'alternative politics'). Cox and Flesher Fominaya underline the new pluralism in strategic terms, identifying the 'slow emergence of a sense of *movements* rather than *movement*: not of the multiplicity of popular

struggles as such, which was always a practical reality facing organizers, but of the growing impossibility of a single strategic organization' (2013: 23).

In Britain, as in many other European countries, these debates took place within a milieu in which socialist traditions remained a major influence. The question of how to understand the relationships between multiple forms of inequality, collective identities and movement strategies produced numerous debates, often fractious, as in the debates about class, race and sexuality which led to the dissolution of the annual Women's Movement Conference in the UK after 1978 and to important movement-based theorising, notably the socialist feminist book *Beyond the Fragments* (Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright 1979). Highly influential among activists and researchers alike in the 1980s, *Beyond the Fragments* offered a critique of the model of organization associated with the traditional Marxist left, which had relegated individuals' needs and personal lives as secondary to the discipline and commitment required of the professional revolutionary. Equally, social theory texts such as *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), written by British-based scholars Laclau and Mouffe, sought to define this politics of multiple social movement subjects and were much debated by scholars and activists. Correspondingly, the dominant theme in British social movement scholarship concerned movements as the source of new political ideas and strategies (the 'why' of movements) rather than their mobilizing processes and structures (the 'how') (e.g. Blühdorn 2007).

Up to the late 1980s at least, the links between movements and university-based intellectuals on the British left were strong and theoretical analysis was an unquestioned part of movement culture; movement intellectuals regularly took part in conferences and contributed to debates at conferences of the non-Trotskyist left and in its magazines, such as *Marxism Today*, *Spare Rib* and *Peace News*. This sensibility—the imbrication of movement scholarship with



movement objectives—remains hugely influential in British movement enquiry across different disciplines today, and is connected to a widespread sense of political and ethical responsibility to the movements under study. In some cases, this has meant engaging in campaigns as activists and drawing explicitly on personal experiences and commitments; scholars such as Paul Chatterton, Graeme Chesters, Jenny Pickerill, Alex Plows, Sasha Roseneil, Paul Routledge and Ian Welsh all write (at least to some extent) from this viewpoint, with reflection from feminist research and critical geography particularly prominent. In this vein, Marshall, Roseneil and Armstrong's work on the material cultural legacy of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp situates the relationship between scholarship and activism through 'polyvocal autoethnography' (2009), whilst for Routledge, the value-laden position of participant-activist research 'subverts the notion of observational distance', and has the potential to create a 'third space within and between academia and activism', whose negotiation opens up the possibility to 'live theory in the immediate' (1996: 401). Of course, as Routledge acknowledges, this position can be fraught; recent thoughtful contributions concerning these blurred, permeable and power-constituted boundaries emphasise the dilemmas inherent in negotiating these positions, and the need for collective strategic reflexive thinking over the ethics, objectives and processes of academic-activist praxis (see for example, Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010; Gillan and Pickerill 2011).

### ***British Movement Scholarship Today***

Bagguley's claim that there is 'no social movement research in Britain' (1997: 152) was thus an overstatement even at the time. From Parkin onward, British scholars engaged with American and, later, European theorising on social movements. In the 1970s, Wilkinson (1971) and Banks

(1972) authored popular texts, and Mann (1973) considered the bases of working-class mobilisation. In the 1980s, the British comparative tradition included a compendium of work on social movements in France (Cerny 1982) and on feminism in the US and Britain (Bouchier 1983). Others studied environmentalism (Cotgrove 1982), CND in its original (Taylor 1988) and revived (Byrne 1988) iterations, and some published in US-based and European journals. Later Scott (1990) reviewed a broad range of American and European literature before examining the purported discontinuity between ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements and rejecting it, and Foweraker (1995), who had previously studied social movements in Latin America, considered whether the allegedly ethnocentric American social movement theory provided tools for cross-nationally comparative analysis, and concluded that it did. Bagguley himself published on movements of the unemployed (1991) and the anti-poll tax movement (1995), while Rootes examined the new social movements and their social bases (1992, 1995).

Nevertheless, there were—and remain—fewer scholars of social movements in Britain than might be expected given the size of the country’s social scientific community and the relative vibrancy of its social movements and movement traditions; there is still no national research group for movement scholars, and there is no nationally recognized ‘Centre’ for the study of social movements. The reasons lie in the failure of the relatively modest and moderate social movement mobilisations in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s to produce political crises or major innovations in the political landscape. In the 1980s, when continental European and American theorists were enthralled by the ‘new’ social movements and the emergence of new parties, British politics was dominated by the last-gasp struggle of the traditional trade union movement; the majoritarian electoral system gave little hope for new parties such as the Greens, and resistance cohered around the Labour Party, then in seemingly permanent opposition. By the

1990s, however, there were signs of change: the campaign against the poll tax was followed by widespread protests against road-building and around environmental issues more generally, and these stimulated renewed research and writing.

Several developments testify to the growing purchase of movement scholarship in academia. First, the Alternative Futures and Popular Protest Conference at Manchester Metropolitan University has run since 1996, covering a wide range of social movement scholarship, but mostly rooted in the British tradition of engagement within and political responsibility to the movements studied. *Alternative Futures* also shows the enduring influence of Marxism on parts of British social movement scholarship, particularly evident in studies of trade union militancy. Second, *Social Movement Studies* was founded (2002) as the second international specialist academic journal on social movements after the US-based *Mobilization*, and provides a distinctive forum for work on social movements. The research interests of the founding editors reflected the general characteristics of British social movement research: George McKay published influential studies of alternative and counter-cultural activism (1996, 1998) highlighting elements of a British tradition of ‘do-it-yourself politics’, from anti-roads protest camps and urban Reclaim the Streets parties to New Age travellers; Tim Jordan worked on the politics of Internet activists and ‘hacktivism’ and published on the culture of activism and its relationship to democracy (2004), which was more rooted in the tradition of interpreting the political meaning of activism than with the type of questions generally dealt with in *Mobilization*; Adam Lent published an important historical overview of post-war British social movements, tracing their ideological and organizational evolution over time (2002). Notably, none of the three founding editors was located in the mainstreams of the sociology of social movements or of contentious politics. This doubtless contributed to the journal’s inclusive

editorial policy. A third sign of the growth of social movement studies is the increasing number of courses on social movements, particularly in sociology departments. This has been aided in Britain, as elsewhere, by textbooks pitched for international readerships but citing some British cases (Tarrow 1994 [2011]; Diani and della Porta 1996/8 [2005]). In addition, there have been textbooks or introductory works on social movements authored by British scholars (Byrne 1997; Crossley 2002; Chesters and Welsh 2011; Edwards 2014).

The assumptions underpinning scholarship on social movements are often differentiated by discipline. Much of the major work in critical geography looks beyond the UK to cases from the global South, developing conceptual analyses of solidarity (Featherstone 2008; Routledge and Cumbers 2009; Brown and Yaffe 2012) and global resistance (Amoore 2005), as well as making important contributions to studies of movement-based campaigns against development projects. International relations scholars have also contributed to research beyond the UK; notable examples include Eschle and Maignashca's analysis of the varied forms of feminism and its frequent exclusion from accounts of the global justice movement (2005), and Death's use of 'counter-conducts' as a Foucauldian approach to explaining protests at global summits (2010). Meanwhile, because of the predominantly institutional focus of politics as a discipline, political scientists have most often written about movements rather than for them (normative analysis being reserved for political theorists) and addressed movements in relation to the state and government (national and sub-national). They have also most often written about movements as discrete actors, defined by their principal issue—thus feminism, peace, and environmentalism and global justice (Carter 1992; Byrne 1997; Lovenduski and Randall 1993; Welsh 2000, Rootes 2009; Rootes and Saunders 2007; Saunders and Rootes 2013). One reason for defining

movements in this way is to facilitate cross-national comparative analysis—which remains the most influential approach to explanation in the discipline.

Environmental movements have been a particular focus of this kind of work (Doherty 2002a; Doyle and MacGregor 2013). Prominent examples include the Transformation of Environmental Activism (TEA) project, a cross-European study of eight countries, co-ordinated by Rootes, that gathered comprehensive data on environmental movements for the decade 1988–97, and pointed to the absence of a common European trajectory for environmental protest, and thus to largely domestic causes for the upsurge in direct-action environmental protest in Britain in the 1990s (Rootes 2003). British environmental direct-action groups have been the subject of numerous studies, placing them in national and local context (Doherty 1999; Doherty et al. 2007; Seel et al. 2000; Wall 1999); their legacy is also evident in the ‘pink and silver’ tendencies in European anti-capitalist protests (Chesters and Walsh 2004; Flesher Fominaya 2013) and the ‘horizontalism’ of the global justice movement. Writing from a position of engaged scholarship, Chesters and Walsh see this process as evidence for a de-territorialized global justice movement (2005; Welsh and Chesters 2006), an emphasis which stands in contrast to comparative political sociologists, who tend to stress national particularities and attenuated cross-national ties in studies of similar groups (Rüdig 1990; Doherty and Hayes 2012a, 2012b; Hayes 2013).

In the policy studies and public administration literature, writing on movements typically focuses on pluralism, (neo)corporatism, and the challenges posed by the arrival of new collective actors: ‘new social movements’ are primarily seen through the lens of what Grant identified as ‘insider/outsider’ actors in governance processes (2005). This approach casts the environmental movement in particular in terms of pressure and interest group politics, with a focus on established NGOs and their consequences for democratic participation. However, this school

typically has tangential interest only in movements *qua* movements; Jordan and Maloney, for example, reject social movement perspectives as ‘underdefined’ (1997: 48–49). Rather, the concern is with the relationship between ‘single-issue campaigns’ and ‘broad church parties’, and the potential of citizens to gain a ‘better return on their participatory investment by acting through specialist organisations’ (Jordan 1998: 318; see also Jordan and Maloney 1997, 2007), with group status in policy development (Christiansen and Dowding 1994, Marsh et al. 2009), and with the effects of movement campaigns on governance regimes in general, and policy subsystem stability (in Westminster and Brussels) in particular (e.g. Marsh 1983; Richardson 2000; Toke and Marsh 2003; Baggott, Allsop and Jones 2004).

In sociology, social network analysis has become increasingly influential. It has been used to study: inter-organizational ties in Glasgow, showing that the city’s enduring socialist politics produced a more cohesive network than Bristol, where cross-movement networks were much weaker (Diani et al. 2010); environmental groups and NGOs in London (Saunders 2007), showing that solidarity is better understood as a property of groups than of wider movements (Saunders 2008a; 2013); Friends of the Earth International, uncovering regional collaboration within a transnational social movement organization (Doherty and Doyle 2013); the adoption of militant tactics through inter-personal networks in the suffragette movement (Edwards 2014); and stability and turnover of personnel within the Provisional IRA (*Irish Republican Army*), (Crossley and Stevenson 2014). The approach in these studies remains essentially interpretive, using network mapping as a strategy of inquiry into movement cultures.

Over the past two decades, social movement scholarship in Britain has developed in new directions, informed by the burgeoning of social movement scholarship worldwide and by a decline in the salience of socialist identities. This development is perhaps bringing the study of

social movements more clearly into the mainstream of sociology; one sign of this is the increasing integration of Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus for reading movement positionality and cultural praxis. A key influence here is Crossley's work on psychiatric survivor movements (2006), complemented by subsequent work by Husu (2013), Ibrahim (2013) and Samuel (2013).

British scholarship on social movements is now also increasingly 'contentious', using the established tools of the transatlantic schools of social movement analysis: work in the 1990s by Roseneil on Greenham Common (1995), and Rootes (1997, 1999) on the environmental movement in particular, introduced a generation of social movement scholars to US and continental European movement analyses and political process approaches. In this vein, Hayes (2002) sought to explain divergent outcomes of environmental campaigns in France through the development of a meso-level, policy-network-focused approach to political opportunity, perspectives also employed in studies of environmental movements in Central and Eastern Europe (Lang-Pickvance et al. 1997, Lang-Pickvance 1998). Closer to home, Doherty examined the process of manufactured vulnerability in the development of protest camp tactics (1999a), and Doherty and Hayes compared anti-GMO crop trashing in Britain and France (2012, 2013). Others have provided analysis of landmark campaigns such as the opposition to the Conservative government's Poll Tax, which helped to bring down Margaret Thatcher (Bagguley 1995) and protests against fuel taxes in 2000 (part of a Europe-wide wave of protest), which caused short-term political paralysis but failed to develop into a social movement (Doherty et al. 2003). Surveys of protesters have increasingly been conducted as part of multi-national comparative studies (e.g. Rüdiger), the 2003 anti-war protests (2010); the G8 Make Poverty History march in Edinburgh in 2005 (Saunders 2008a); and the 2009 climate change march in London

(Wahlström, Wennerhag and Rootes 2013). Saunders et al. (2012) analysed survey data from protests in seven European countries as part of the Caught in the Act comparative project on contextualising protest ([www.protestsurvey.eu/](http://www.protestsurvey.eu/)), showing that participation in protest by novices, returners, repeaters, and stalwarts each required different explanations. Also significant is comparative work on environmental activism (Doherty and Doyle 2008, Rootes 2004); work on grassroots activism on environmental issues has chiefly been published in the journals *Local Environment* and *Environmental Politics* (Rootes 2008, 2013; Rootes and Leonard 2010). Other influential work focuses on cultural approaches to movements, including Saunders' reading of collective identity in environmental movements (2008b) and Flesher Fominaya's study of collective identity (2010) or on the diffusion of forms of protest, notably Biggs' analyses of sit-ins in the US civil rights movement (Andrews and Biggs 2006), the spread of suicide protests (Biggs 2013) and of ethnic violence in Gujarat (Biggs and Dhattiwala 2012).

There are, of course, social movements of the right as well as movements of the left in Britain, but as in many other countries they have most often been analysed from a distance by researchers, through survey data. In recent decades parties such as the National Front (in the 1970s and 1980s) and the British National Party (in the 2000s) have intermittently threatened electoral breakthroughs that have not been sustained, and their fractious internal politics has consistently undermined their ability to develop stable organization, outflanked by the Conservative Party in the late 1970s and 1980s (Gilroy 1987) and more recently by the populist UK Independence Party. Most work on far-right mobilization is focused on political parties (Husbands 1983; Carter 2005; Goodwin 2011; Biggs and Knauss 2012) and has concentrated more on elections and political opportunities, though there is clear scope for future work here on activism, mobilization and counter-mobilization.



### *Trends and Future Developments*

Since the 1980s, scholarship on social movements has expanded considerably in Britain. There has also been a shift of focus, reflecting the decline of the influence of Marxism on political debates about and within social movements. It was never really accurate to speak of British exceptionalism, as if Britain did not have new social movements and its Left was only concerned with the Labour party (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 37); Rootes (1992) showed that was a perception more reflective of the barriers to new parties in the British political system than of the social bases and politics of social movements. Yet an orientation towards the ideas of the Left remained important for most British researchers on social movements. Even if Marxism's star has declined, it has not disappeared altogether: for example Barker's study of solidarity, his co-edited collection on leadership within social movements (2001) and co-stewardship of the Alternative Futures Conference connects Marxist with other traditions of social movement research (Barker 2013).<sup>1</sup> Thus there are conversations rather than silences between Marxist and other traditions of research in Britain. Despite the diversification of movement research since the 1980s, there remains a predominant concern among British researchers with assessing the meaning of social movement action, whether through its ability to generate new ideas or what it tells us about current society. We have argued that this is a concern shared with the first New Left and the 'history from below' tradition, and that this leads in turn to a strong concern with political responsibility towards the movements being researched.

Given what we have argued to be a particular interest in Britain in movement-generated ideas, and judging the political significance of particular cases, this is one area where we might expect further developments that might contribute to theoretical development within Britain and

beyond. There have already been important studies in this vein, which provide a platform for future work. Gillan has shown a route through the thorny issue of the relationship between framing and ideology (2006, 2008). Roseneil's two books on Greenham Common (1995, 2000) are revealing, in that whilst the first drew on standard social movement concepts such as political opportunities and repertoires of contention, the second drew on the same empirical material but placed it in relation to social theory, particularly queer theory, to draw out some features of Greenham Common that were novel—notably its lack of concern with (feminist) theory and its irreverence, both elements that were evident in the later 1990s and 2000s UK direct-action movements (see also Rucht 2013). British protest camps and related direct-action movements, from those against roads, GM crops, and climate change (Schlembach et al. 2012) to corporate malfeasance and inequality (UK Uncut and the British version of Occupy) can be read as defining a peculiarly British repertoire and tradition, albeit one that also has some international precursors, parallels and imitators (Feigenbaum, Frenzel and McCurdy 2013). There is scope for further work on the balance and direction of national and international influences in this field. Although generational differences within the women's movement have been the subject of recent projects by historians (British Library 2012) that may complement work on feminist generations in the United States (Whittier 1995), there is clear potential for more analysis of the generational continuities and differences between British activist generations in direct-action movements (Doherty 2002b).

The broadening of social movement research in Britain since the 1990s has meant that more researchers are working within European and comparative frameworks. Here we foresee two further areas for future work: the changing nature of movement organization and the effects of repression on social movements. The apparent increase in episodic protests and declining role

of movement organizations in shaping activist identity, combined with the increased role of the Internet in mobilization and as a new public sphere of debate, has been already been the subject of research in Britain (Pickerill 2003; Gillan et al. 2008) and this is likely to be developed further in the coming years. British social psychologists have become increasingly interested in protest and contentious politics, following the examples of Reicher (1984) who effectively critiqued the ‘irrationalist’ interpretation of riots, and Drury and Reicher (2000, 2003) who explored identity formation and the dynamics of protest.

Research on repression of social movements in the UK has been minimal compared to the United States. There are notable exceptions (such as work by Waddington on protest policing 1998, and Waddington et al. on riots 2010); yet it is revealing that Poulson, Caswell and Grey (2014), comparing the content of *Mobilization* and *Social Movement Studies*, identify repression as a key area where the two journals attract submissions with different focuses. Recent developments may change this: police tactics such as ‘kettling’ (the isolation and containment of large numbers of demonstrators for long periods to prevent them from engaging in mobile protest) have been subjected to critical scrutiny in the media, in parliament and by the police Inspectorate. Similar tactics have been used by police in other Western countries and may signify a response to the uncertainty occasioned by the decline of formal organizations as guarantors of the expected negotiated rituals of the mass demonstration, but recent reviews of ‘kettling’ in Britain have recognised that its excessive use has been provocative and suggest instead a more strategic policing of demonstrations based on intelligence. Police intelligence gathering is itself controversial, however. Investigations by *Guardian* journalists, working with movement activists and whistleblowers from within the police, have shown that undercover officers were, going back to the 1960s, planted for many years in a wide range of social movement groups that the

police deemed to be ‘domestic extremists’ or subversives even when they had no history of violence and posed no credible threat to state security (Lewis and Evans 2013). Social psychologists have previously examined how activists in roads protests were ‘empowered’ by their participation in protest (Drury and Reicher 2005). They may now examine the psychological effects on individuals and activist communities of the knowledge that those they considered fellow activists, and who became friends, lovers, and in some cases, fathered children with activists, were in fact undercover police.

If in the United States social movement research is definable as a sub-discipline of sociology centred on the contentious politics school, plus those who argue for more attention to activist culture and emotion, in Britain there is no analogous school of social movement research. Instead the phenomena of social movements are approached by a variety of social scientific methods across several disciplines. This, however, inhibits the institutionalisation of social movement studies in Britain because the Higher Education Funding Council’s (HEFCE) evaluation of departmental research ‘outputs’, conducted every five to seven years (now known as the Research Excellence Framework), is organized by disciplines, which increases institutional pressures to publish in high-ranking discipline-specific journals, and to address central disciplinary debates,<sup>2</sup> and acts as a disincentive to inter-disciplinary work. Research students, however, may be relatively insulated from such pressures. Not only is a great deal of the empirical research on social movements in Britain undertaken by research students but their collaboration across disciplines has also begun to bear fruit. The student-organised 2012 interdisciplinary conference, Theory, Action and Impact of Social Protest (TAISP), brought together at Kent over 160 delegates from a range of social science disciplines and spawned a new journal, *Contention: The Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Protest*. The second TAISP

conference, in 2014, although it remained committed to interdisciplinary research, attracted official sponsorship from the British Psychological Society. It is conceivable that social movement research in Britain might, in future, be centred in social psychology rather than sociology or political science.

Most instances of contention that have given rise to significant mobilisations have been the subject of investigation. However, by comparison with the US, the study of social movements in Britain has been relatively un-institutionalised and theoretically diverse; it has neither received formal recognition from learned societies, nor has it developed a dominant theoretical or methodological canon. Moreover, it has not enjoyed secure funding; it is noteworthy that much of the recent work on the environmental and global justice movements was EU-funded. Nevertheless, although the study of social movements has never been a central theme for any of the major professional associations nor a priority area for national research funding, the funding agencies have sometimes supported social movement research, the major British sociology journals and academic publishers have never been closed to social movement studies, and a considerable number of articles on social movements and social movement theory have made their way into print. Thus, although there is no distinctive British 'school' of social movement research, there is, as we hope we have demonstrated, a rich and varied tradition of social movement research. There is no reason to suppose that it will not continue.

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*Parties in Europe* (1995), *Environmental Movements: Local, National and Global* (1999), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe* (2003), *Acting Locally: Local Environmental Mobilizations and Campaigns* (2008) and *Environmental Movements and Waste Infrastructure* (2010). He is editor in chief of the journal *Environmental Politics*.

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## Notes

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1. Scholar-activists of British origin such as John Holloway (2002) and Pete Waterman (2001) have also made influential contributions to debates about social movement strategy, but as this work has mostly been done away from Britain—in Mexico (Holloway) and the Netherlands (Waterman)—we have not claimed them as examples British social movement scholarship.
2. It had been hoped that new guidelines evaluating research ‘impact’ would facilitate engaged research with movements. However, this seems unlikely insofar as the terms in which ‘impact’ is constructed privilege measurable, auditable outcomes on the subjects of research—a near impossible task for researchers working on and with social movements.