The Future of Social Movements in Canada

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOURTH S.D. CLARK SYMPOSIUM
ON THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN SOCIETY

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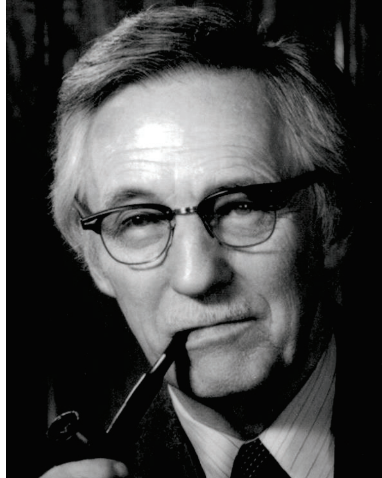
About the cover photo: Idle No More is a social movement that was launched in December 2012. It promoted Indigenous sovereignty to protect water, air, and land. The cover photo was taken by Blaire Russell on 10 December 2012 at the Idle No More Blood Tribe Rally in Standoff, Alberta.

The layering of a single strong colour over a black-and-white photo was a technique first employed by the Blue Note jazz label in the 1940s and 1950s, when jazz was strongly associated with the struggle for equality by Black Americans. It is a style that is appropriately invoked for the subject of this book.



S.D. Clark

The University of Toronto's Department of Sociology was established in 1963. Samuel Delbert (S.D.) Clark (1910–2003) was its founding chair.

Clark was born in Lloydmister, Alberta, and attended the University of Saskatchewan, the London School of Economics, McGill University and the University of Toronto. He analyzed the transformation of successive Canadian frontiers from socially disorganized settlements into organized societies. He then conducted research on how economic change in Canada produced inequality reflected in patterns of residential segregation.

Clark's books include *The Canadian Manufacturers Association* (1939), *The Social Development of Canada* (1942), *Church and Sect in Canada* (1948), *Movements of Political Protest in Canada* (1959), *The Developing Canadian Community* (1962), *The Suburban Society* (1966), *Canadian Society in Historical Perspective* (1976) and *The New Urban Poor* (1978).

Clark served as president of the Canadian Political Science Association, honorary president of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association and president of the Royal Society of Canada. He was awarded the J.B. Tyrell Historical Medal, became a foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and an Officer of the Order of Canada, and received honorary degrees from half a dozen Canadian universities.

In 1999, Clark's son, William Edmund (Ed) Clark, endowed the S.D. Clark Chair in Sociology at the University of Toronto in honour of his father.

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Are Social Movements Still Relevant?

Howard Ramos

Increasingly, political action falls outside common academic definitions of "social movements." More and more political mobilization tends to be event-centred, meme-focused, prefigurative (acting out the future it seeks while ignoring existing institutions, norms, and organizations), and discursive (focusing on meaning, words, and narratives). Political action also increasingly transcends borders and relies on social media and women leaders.

Social movement scholarship deals inadequately with these characteristics because the repertoire of action associated with mainstream social movement theory and research is bound to assumptions linked to the rise of states and democracy as well structural changes stemming from the Industrial Revolution. Much has changed since then. Much contemporary contentious mobilization takes place without reference to the state, and much of it is blurred with mainstream politics. Moreover, in most recent high-profile cases of mobilization, movements emerge after critical events rather than causing them, thus putting into question the mechanistic approach driven by dominant American social movement research (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001). Because current parameterizations of contentious politics pay insufficient attention to new and emerging political phenomena, it is worth asking whether the social movement—as an academic concept and a political form—is still relevant in the twenty-first century.

To engage this issue, I first identify how political-historical contexts have influenced forms of contention and how conceptualizations of movements have varied accordingly. I then review key definitions of social movements and examine how elements of those definitions fit contemporary political action. Social movement societies, Indigenous resistance, anti-authoritarian mobilization, and hashtag movements are discussed to identify common characteristics of contemporary mobilization and understand how the state and democracy shape or fail to shape contemporary social movements. I conclude by advocating an event- and field-centred approach to studying movements as a means of identifying the concepts, actors, and repertoires that define contemporary political struggles.

The importance of political-historical era in shaping forms of political contention

Modern social movements originated during the consolidation of states and democracy in the 1760s. A new merchant class was on the rise, and it fought for the creation of parliaments to institutionalize its grip on power (Mann 1986; Tilly and Wood 2013: 25). Social movements emerged as the modern state became the formal repository of power, and as a means of contesting its authority. The polity had become open enough to allow for contention but remained closed enough to prevent the overthrow of power holders, creating unprecedented space for political actors to challenge power while accepting the institutions that maintain it. In this context, social movements assumed unique properties and repertoires of political action that still mark some instances of contentious politics today (Tilly 1978; 2007; Tilly with Wood 2013). Social movements as a political form engaged in public demonstrations, occupations, and marches, hoisted banners displaying slogans and symbols, spanned numerous locales, and enjoyed broad and sustained participation. Academics still associate these characteristics with movements today.

As historical phenomena, movements evolved with the world around them (Crossley 2002; Diani 1992; Melucci 1980; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Tilly and Wood 2013; Touraine, 1985). Dominant theories to account for them also evolved in relation to that changing world and reflect the political forms of the times. These observations imply that parameterization using old contexts and old concepts is bound to miss political forms emerging in new movements and new political-historical contexts that shape them. It leads me to ask whether social movements are a political form from a bygone era.

What are social movements?

Before answering this question, one must understand how social scientists define social movements. Diani (1992) and Crossley (2002) usefully analyze key definitions identifying core elements of the term.

Diani (1992) wrote in a period when the field was divided between North American and European scholars, with the former focusing on political structures, contexts, and rational actors and the latter on identity construction and post-materialism. Diani drew attention to five leading scholars of collective behaviour, resource mobilization, political process, and new social movement theories. He argued that, across these perspectives and at their core, social movements are "networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities" (Diani 1992: 1). He believed his definition distinguished the social movement as a political form from interest groups, political parties, protest events, and coalitions, yet was robust enough to include all elements needed to bridge competing perspectives that invoked the term for theoretical or analytic purposes.

Crossley (2002) wrote at the turn of the twenty-first century, when the field was less divided but the dominant political process approach seemed not to apply well to recent movements and actions. Globalization, neoliberalism, and the Seattle tactics were changing how politics was negotiated. Crossley examined how collective behaviour, political process, and network approaches explain social movements and introduced discussion of how a field approach developed by Bourdieu could be applied to the study of social movements. He aimed to introduce an actor-centred approach to research on contentious politics.

To explore the definitions that Diani and Crossley analyzed, as well as those deemed most relevant by Google Scholar, Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of definitions of social movements in the popular academic literature. The Google Scholar search was conducted on 8 October 2018 and included the search term: "social movements" definition. (For additional details, see http://perceptionsofchange.ca/socialmovementsstillrelevant.html.)

Table 1 identifies thirteen characteristics found across the definitions. For common definitions of social movements, a high degree of consensus was found on four terms: change, collective identity, conflict, and redistribution of rewards and power. A moderate level of consensus existed around five terms: action, beliefs/ideas/values, outsiders, social structures, and solidarity. Low consensus was found on four terms: networks, organization, purposiveness, and sustained action. Interestingly, despite the dominance of the American political process model, with its foundation in the resource mobilization tradition, the low-consensus term elements are outliers rather than the norm for understanding social movements.

Can contemporary forms of contention be adequately defined by these points and levels of consensus? If not, we must reconceptualize the form political contention takes and ask whether the label of social movement is appropriate. Most definitions of social movements

distinguish movements from the contexts in which they emerge, positioning them as political actors outside the mainstream that take radical, public, protest-oriented actions. The next section explores the importance of political-historical context by examining links between movements, on the one hand,
and protest and democratic nation-states, on the other. It sets out to determine the degree to which links discovered in the past are present today.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of definitions of social movements

Consensus	Characteristics
High	Change; collective identity; conflict; redistribution of rewards and power
Medium	Actions/behaviour; beliefs/ideas/values; outsiders; social structure; solidarity
Low	Networks; organization; purpose; sustained action

Contradictions in declining democracy yet continuing protest

The question of whether social movements are still relevant stems from a contradiction observed in contemporary politics. Around the world we see increasing threats to democracy but a rise in protest. This shift is important given that social movements have tended to be linked to democratic states or the rise of democratic institutions (Tilly 1978; Tilly and Wood 2013). Examining the state of democracy across contemporary societies leads to the conclusion that its future is uncertain. Is the current context conducive to social movements or is it spawning new forms of contention?

Much research concludes that democracy is weakening. For instance, Freedom House declared that democracy is in "crisis," with almost two-thirds of states losing democratic freedoms over the last twelve years (Abramowitz 2018). The same conclusion was reached by the Cato Institute and affiliated think tanks by examining personal, economic, and human freedom in 159 countries from 2008 to 2015 (Vasquez and Porcnik 2017). More than half the regions in the world are experiencing a decline in freedom and, on average, declines are greater than improvements. Notably, declines are seen in many parts of Europe and North America, known for being more open and established democracies, as well as in Latin American. *The Economist*'s global democracy index fell between 2016 and 2017 due to a decline in 89 countries and it led the conclusion that democracy is under attack (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2017).

Change over time in the 2018 Edelman Global Trust Index indicates "a world of distrust," with most people in most countries no longer trusting institutions (Edelman 2018). Many people worry that lack of institutional trust gives rise to neo-fascism (Giroux 2016; Kellner 2016). Electoral victories of leaders in the Philippines, Hungary, Turkey, Brazil, and the United States who claim to speak for "the people" while working to curb freedom of expression, undermine political institutions, and fan ethnic or racial tensions are cases in point. Such trends, although much weaker, are apparent in Canada too, as evidenced by the election of "populist" premiers in Ontario and Quebec in 2018.

Since 2006, global protest has increased across a wide range of issues including economic justice and austerity, failure of political representation, rights, and global justice, and this is especially the case in high-income countries (Ortiz et al. 2013). Almost 20 percent of Americans, moreover, said they participated in a protest or rally since 2016 (Sampathkumar 2018). However, Goldstone (2004) warns that much of that mobilization occurs within a broader field of political actions, and numbers may be inflated because of cross-fertilization of one form

of political action to others. Biggs (2015) shows this to be the case in the UK, where protest numbers are inflated by strikes and other political actions being reported as protests in many datasets. When that is taken into account, the number of people participating in protests actually declines. In other words, there is more reporting of protest but fewer people protesting. This can be seen in Canada through Cycles 17, 22, and 27 of the General Social Survey which measure several types of political practice. Table 2.2 shows mixed and, for the most part, undramatic trends. Voting in federal elections increased slightly from 2003 to 2013, but the trend has been downward since 1958 (Brym, Roberts, and Strohschein 2019: 375). Between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of people saying they signed a petition barely changed, while the percentage of people boycotting or choosing products for ethical or political reasons increased only a little. The percentage of people saying they attended public meetings fell substantially, and there was a small drop in the percentage of people saying they engaged in demonstrations. In the latter case, one of the biggest drops occurred among those who were 18 to 24 years old at the time of the survey. Among 18-24-year-olds, a 2.5 percentage point drop occurred during the period under consideration (from 12.0 percent to 9.5 percent), slightly more than the 1.5 percentage point drop for the entire population. It appears that fewer Canadians are protesting, especially younger Canadians.

What do these trends mean for social movements?

Table 2.2 Canadian political practices, 2003-13

	2003	2008	2013
Voted in federal election	70.6	73.3	73.0
Searching for political information	25.7	28.8	38.9
Signing a petition	28.4	24.7	27.5
Boycotting or choosing a product for ethical reasons	20.7	26.9	23.0
Attending a public meeting	22.1	18.5	15.3
Participating in a demonstration	6.1	3.9	4.6
Source: General Social Survey, Cycles 17, 22, and 27 (Social Identity), Statistics Canada-PUMF. Compiled by Rachel McLay, Dalhousie University.			

What fits the concept of social movement?

If we examine contemporary contentious politics and the phenomena labelled social movements, we find numerous political actions that do not fit existing definitions of "social movement." For example, social movements are increasingly hard to distinguish from other forms of political action and their language and tactics are increasingly coopted by dominant power holders, nativists, and professional organizations (Meyer 2015; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). When such cooptation occurs, the concept of social movement becomes over-stretched and hollowed out. Another example of discontinuity between definition and reality is Indigenous mobilization that resists colonization and, in doing so, pursues self-determination, often in a manner that is prefigurative (Wilkes 2015). When this occurs, the acceptance of the state as the vessel of power is questioned, and the alternative consists of acts of resistance that are not merely protest but actions in pursuit of a new form of power. Still other examples can be seen in the rise of anti-authoritarian movements like the Arab Spring and hashtag movements like Occupy and #MeToo, which in some cases challenge the state outright and in others have no predefined purpose, identity, or solidarity and which lack clearly defined goals and plans of engagement with power

structures. In these cases, we witness contentious action, but it is unclear whether we are witnessing social movements as conventionally understood. Most recent political movements tend to be defined by events, memes, and the technology that facilitates them, requiring that we inspect them through a non-parameterized analytic lens to see what, if anything, is different about their struggle for power, their repertoire of action, and their form of politics.

Social movement societies: Make America Great Again

More than two decades ago, David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (1998) argued that advanced democracies were becoming "social movement societies." They held that mobilization had changed from risky, contentious, and extra-state action in the 1960s to predictable and accommodating action that was partly incorporated into the state by the 1990s. In Canada, their argument certainly holds weight because of the longstanding reliance of many advocacy organizations on government funding and the consequent blurring of state and movement (Ramos and Rodgers 2015). This means that although movement organizations have been critical of authority, many cannot claim independence of the state. Thus, the English Canadian women's movement was unable to sustain itself in the face of government funding cuts (Rodgers and Knight 2011). In revisiting the social movement society thesis, Meyer (2015) encouraged researchers to focus on how it is associated with the cooptation of social movement tactics and language by nativists, which is abetted by new technologies (including social media and other Internet-based platforms) and the silos of communication and community they create.

All these trends are linked to the rise of Donald Trump. He repeatedly used the term "movement" to describe his actions and rally the support of his base, and some social movement scholars have used the term to describe his mobilization and that of the Tea Party which preceded it (Rohlinger and Bunnage 2017; Roth, B. 2018; Roth, S. 2018). Trump also famously claimed to be running as an outsider and, in fact, worked outside the Republican organization. His Presidency has used similar tactics and positioning (Gunn 2017).

Each of the core elements that define a social movement applies to Trump's "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) campaign and what he calls a movement. Consider the high-consensus elements in Table 2.1. Trump pursued change, created or amplified a collective identity, positioned himself in conflict with mainstream politics, and did so in the name of redistributing power and status. These initiatives are all drivers of his MAGA meme. If we focus on the elements of social movements concerning which there is a medium level of consensus, we see that Trump does not promote actions traditionally linked to social movements. However, he uses beliefs and attitudes to build his movement; he (ironically) positions himself and his supporters as outsiders, although he and many of them have held power; he does not overtly challenge the social structure of society or the state, although he challenges political parties and leaders and, by doing so, has weakened the state; and he has created solidarity in his base but deep divisions in American society. Among the low-consensus aspects of what researchers consider a social movement, we find that Trump's mobilization taps networks and analytics used to micro-target people who would otherwise be unconnected; he has relied on organization, largely his family and those in his business network; he set out with a clear agenda—to gain power and maintain it; and he has sustained his actions and that of his base as he continues to mobilize people. This case illustrates a key problem with the contemporary definition of "social movement:" it is so broad it can be applied to movements that many if not most researchers in the field would not consider social movements.

The case of MAGA illustrates other issues in contemporary social movement scholarship. Much of Trump's mobilization was fueled by social media, Twitter and Facebook in particular (Gunn 2017: 53), and it mined data on followers (Brym et al. 2018; Pybus 2019). This method of mobilization gave his movement the appearance of having a multi-directional, non-hierarchical (or "rhizomatic") pattern of diffusion and structure that was fueled by memes or key slogans (Castells 2015). These features are increasingly common in contentious political action, but they may or may not align with what researchers consider social movements.

Indigenous movements: Idle No More

Cooptation of movement language and tactics, and the blurring of movements with other political forms, are trends that have been observed for at least 20 years. Another form of mobilization that challenges the concept of social movement is Indigenous resistance. This is especially the case in Canada, where the legal rights of Indigenous peoples are recognized in the constitution and as the country engages in a quest for "reconciliation"' that is meant to come to terms with its history of colonization (Ramos 2008; 2006; Wilkes et al. 2017). Both trends make Indigenous mobilization different than other movements in Canada.

In a critical review of the legacy of her work on Indigenous mobilization, Rima Wilkes (2015) questions whether it is the same as protest, and, in turn, whether the analytical tools of social movement research can be used to understand Indigenous political action. She argues that treating Indigenous movements like other social movements fails to recognize the territorial and colonial elements associated with Indigenous mobilization and that the state has been imposed on original inhabitants who do not necessarily recognize its legitimacy or the legitimacy of the institutions it creates (Alfred, 1999). Most social movements accept the state as the site of ultimate authority, but traditional Indigenous movements largely resist that view. Ignoring this difference can lead to erroneous interpretation of events and actions.

With respect to the four high-consensus elements of the academic definition of social movements, just one seems to apply to Idle No More: change. Those acting in the name of the hashtag were seeking to stop the federal government from acting without consulting Indigenous peoples. Yet the demands of the movement were never fully articulated; despite having clear initiators it did not have clear leaders. The movement had an ambiguous collective identity, with strong generational and identity divisions among Indigenous communities. It tended to avoid outright conflict. Although some actors suggested more radical tactics, few took place; unlike similar national protests in the 1990s, there was little violence or threat of it. The movement also did not seek redistribution of power or rewards, but was rather defensive in nature and, above all, educational, encouraging Indigenous peoples to return to their traditional teachings and relationship to the environment.

Examining the elements of medium consensus, we find that two fit the movement—actions/behaviour and beliefs/ideas/values. The movement was event- and action-based, with round dances and social media posts as its main activities. The movement was a call for action based on traditional beliefs and values. It was not a movement that positioned itself as an outsider and did not engage in directly changing social structures or building solidarity. It was a movement based on individuals responding to calls.

None of the elements of low consensus fit Idle No More. Despite Wood's (2015) claim that the movement relied on established networks, it did not look like past Indigenous mobilization and introduced a new generation of activists. It was not formally organized. Its purpose was originally to mobilize against certain legislation but it moved beyond that when the

government tried to negotiate with its presumed leaders, and the action was not sustained. As quickly as the movement emerged, it disappeared.

As with MAGA, Idle No More was defined by a meme, which may have offered the appearance of a rhizomatic structure, and it was heavily dependent on social media for communication and the spread of information. It was prefigurative in its actions. Rather than making demands on the state, it was a call to action to show how the state did not align with Indigenous values. It was a call for people to return to their traditional teachings and resist colonization by practicing traditional values. As with other recent movements and recent contentious politics, women were key political actors in initiating the movement.

Anti-authoritarian movements: the Arab Spring

As noted earlier, social movements have tended to be linked to democratic states or those seeking to liberalize. One of the key criticisms of American social movement theory has been that it does not work well in explaining movements in authoritarian states or the developing world (McAdam et al. 2001). With the demonstrations of the so-called "Arab Spring," several social movement scholars have used social movement and network theory to try to understand the rapid mobilization and diffusion of the mobilization from Tunisia, to Egypt, to the rest of the region, and subsequently the rest of the world (e.g., Brym et al. 2014; Castells 2012; Tufecki 2017; Tufecki and Wilson 2012). The movement began after a young street vendor set himself on fire in 2010 to "protest against the humiliation of repeated confiscation of his fruit and vegetable stand by the local police after he refused to pay a bribe" (Castells 2012: 22). His act sparked demonstrations by other youths after being posted on the Internet through social media. The protests spread across the country, resulting in more videos of protests and police violence taken with smartphones and were transmitted through new communications platforms, such as Twitter. It gave youth and other contentious political actors an unfiltered means of communication, linking people in unprecedented ways (Tufecki 2017). The protesters demanded democracy and they toppled regimes across the region. It also inspired actions in other countries, such as the Maple Spring in Quebec and Occupy Wall Street.

Castells (2012) argues that rhizomatic structures and social media generated the action and led to its widespread diffusion not only across the Middle East but to other movements around the world. Brym et al. (2012) highlight the importance of established organizations that responded to events and helped support protesters and amplify their efforts. Tufecki (2017) places less emphasis on existing structures and instead notes that the movement's early success was based on its use of new media platforms, which authorities did not control, in a fluid political context. Tufecki, a participant in several Arab Spring events, highlights the fragility of such movements. She notes that new media allowed rapid mobilization, but networks, organization, and identity were largely built in reaction to the events and memes rather than sparking them. Because of this event-centredness, each part of the movement was open to repression once power holders developed counter-measures and tactics. The technology and networks that led to mobilization was eventually used to repress the movement and has increasingly been used by populist movements and those seeking to destabilize democratic institutions.

When this type of mobilization is examined in light of the elements of social movements on which strong consensus exists, we see clear demands for change and liberalization among Arab Spring movement actors, an ambiguous collective identity formed in the course of action, a challenge to authority and occupation of space, and a demand for redistribution of power. With

respect to elements that have medium consensus, the movement was action-based, revolving around critical events and occupations, and it was solidly built around collective beliefs. However, it is unclear how or if actors were positioned as outsiders; they demanded a change of social structures, but it is uncertain whether solidarity existed until after mobilization. Tufecki (2013; 2017) notes that many actors were constructing their microcelebrity as much as they were posting about the movement. As a result, identity and solidarity were constructed after rather than before events. The same can be said with respect to low consensus elements of social movements, such as networks, which in many cases were loose and formed through social media interactions, and organization, which emerged from events rather than driving their occurrence. In many locations the movement was born out of individuals acting alone out of frustration. Action was sustained for the short term, but like other recent movements it dissipated almost as quickly as it emerged.

Like other recent political forms of contention, many of the core elements of classic social movement definitions occurred after critical events rather than being the drivers of events. This means that much recent mobilization is event-centred. Such sequencing is more in line with early collective behaviour approaches rather than the mechanism-focused approach of political process theory that dominates American research (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001).

Hashtag movements: Occupy, #BlackLivesMatter, and #MeToo

Many of the features observed in the Arab Spring's mobilization are also evident in other movements that have emerged since. In part, that is because the Arab Spring inspired successor movements (Castells 2012). Perhaps its biggest influence was on Occupy Wall Street, hereafter Occupy, which was also inspired by protests around the world against inequities associated with the 2008-09 global economic crisis (Gitlin 2013). Occupy took off after Vancouver-based Adbusters issued a call to occupy Wall Street in September 2011. In many ways, the movement's name is the result of the meme generated by the group. Occupy did not have formal leaders or formalized demands. It was loosely organized, and it developed a unique repertoire of actions, including the human microphone. It also generated its own memes, such as "We are the 99%" which brought discussion of income inequality to the forefront of public discussion (Gitlin 2013; Calhoun 2013). The movement's memes and style of mobilization spread to over 80 countries and more than 600 cities.

Castells (2012) described how Occupy was characterized by the occupation of space and loose, rhizomatic networks. It also had many of the features of the global justice movement, sharing a lineage with the Seattle tactics (della Porta 2008). Yet it was different in several ways. In particular, it was more a moment than a movement. (Gitlin 2013) It began with a large and diffuse support base consisting of unnetworked people, which led to tensions between core movement actors and those who responded with less direct action.

Overall, the standard elements used to define a social movement do not fare well in describing Occupy. Among the four high-consensus elements of a social movement, only two are met by the movement: the hope for change and an attempt to achieve redistribution of resources. In terms of the medium consensus elements, Occupy was action-based and event-centred. However, it did not enunciate a clear consensus on beliefs or values and it is unclear how actors were positioned. It focused on prefigurative performance of alternative values, but it is unclear whether widespread solidarity emerged in the movement. The low consensus elements do not fare well: it is uncertain whether networks were fully utilized, new networks emerged, and people simply responded to a meme. Organization emerged *in situ*, but there was little

coordination across sites or even within Occupy encampments. The purpose of the movement was to fight economic inequality, but Occupy lacked leaders and clear demands, and the movement was sustained for only a few months before largely disappearing. Like other examples discussed earlier, the movement was event centred. It relied on memes. It was prefigurative. It relied on social media. And it was transnational.

Space does not permit detailed analysis of other movements, such as Black Lives Matter or #MeToo. However, Table 2.3 explores how they compare to movements discussed here by highlighting emergent features of contemporary movements and the forms their politics takes. In brief, Table 2.3 demonstrates that many features of what researchers refer to as social movements do not apply to contemporary movements. Common across recent movements are event-centredness, or politics driven by critical events; the importance of memes; the use of social media and new technology; and having a primary effect on public discourse, not the state.

What will the Fourth Industrial Revolution mean for social movements?

Recent movements have pushed the limits of how researchers parameterize "social movements." In part this may be the result of the changing political-historical context. Recall that social movements as a political form emerged with the Industrial Revolution, a profound technological shift. As the world is currently entering a "Fourth Industrial Revolution" (Schwab 2016) characterized by the power of information, new technology, robotics, algorithms, and artificial intelligence, one must again ask how these changes will affect political forms and the contest of power.

Early signs indicate that new technology is giving the upper hand to authoritarian leaders. It has been coopted to mobilize populist forces (Brym et al. 2018) and it has become a tool for repressive states to clamp down on its citizens. China's use of facial recognition software is an example of the latter. The technology has been deployed mainly to supress Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other minorities or dissidents. Bots that troll political supporters have been used in conjunction with the technology. Artificial intelligence was key to Russian interference in the 2016 American election as well electoral races throughout Europe. Added to the mix is the role of large information companies such as Amazon, Google, Facebook and Apple. Most of the world's information passes through one of the four, and their teams and algorithms control the flow of what is said, seen, and heard.

To date, the information power of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is largely unregulated. If states are late reigning it in, the technology and power that comes with it could soon outpace states in meeting the needs of people and in turn challenge them for power. In many respects this is already beginning to happen and may usher in a new political-historical era. Yet social movement researchers and social scientists still theorize and conceptualize power using old parameterizations. What these new developments will mean for social movements and forms of political resistance are unclear. What is clear is that we need new concepts to understand the shifting political-historical context and emerging forms of politics. How do we derive them?

An event-centered, field approach to twenty-first century contentious politics

We cannot predict what political resistance will look like in the rest of the twenty-first century. What is clear is that protest still matters, for now, and most contemporary mobilization is event-centred. If this is the case it is fruitful to adopt an "eventful" approach to understanding political contention (della Porta 2008; Sewell 1996). Such an approach examines historical context as a

Table 2.3 Characteristics of recent movements

	Characteristics of movement	MAGA	#IdleNoMore	Arab Spring	Occupy	#BlackLivesMatter	#MeToo
Core social movement concepts	Action/behavior	?	x	x	x	x	x
	Beliefs/ideas/values	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Challenge/conflict	x		x			
	Change	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Collective (identity)	x		?		x	
	Networks	x		?	?		
	Organized	?					
	Outside	x		?		x	?
	Purposive	?	?	?			
	Redistribution of rewards/power	x		x	x		
	Social structure	?		x			
	Solidarity	x		?			
	Sustained	x					
Contemporary movement characteristics	Event centred		x	x	x	x	x
	Meme	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Rhizomatic	?	?	?	?	?	?
	Prefigurative		x		x		
	Redefinition of discourse	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Social media	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Transnational			x	x	x	x
	Women		x			x	x

Note: An "x" signifies that the element was present in the movement. A "?" signifies it is unclear whether the element was present in the movement. An empty cell signifies that the element was not present in the movement.

matter of ebbs and flows, recognizing that some events have a bigger impact on societies and their political economy than others, with rare events being transformational, changing institutions and their practices and disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions and power relations (Sewell 2005; 1996; Staggenborg 1993; Wood et al. 2017). As the form of politics changes, and as the containers of power (states) are challenged by changing political-historical forces, focusing on events might be the appropriate way to navigate these changes.

An event-centred approach examines assemblages of concepts, actors, actions, and social relations that emerge as fields of power and politics around events. It takes on a non-parameterized mode of investigation; such an inductive approach allows researchers to identify the correlations among political actions (Goldstone 2004) and in doing so can help identify new actions, tactics, and actors. The approach also avoids trends that are overlooked by the prescriptive and parameterized approaches that have come to dominate mainstream social movement research. To this end, we would be well advised to adopt a Bourdieusian approach to the study of contentious politics.

Bourdieu's non-parameterized theory and his use of correspondence analysis illustrate how fields of capital are created and overlap. He shows how differences across commonly held parameterizations of social dimensions come apart when they are no longer assumed *a priori* and are instead seen as distributions of actions and practices without pre-definition or expectation. If social movements researchers follow suit, we will be able to examine power as it emerges in struggles around critical events that trigger fields (Sewell 2005). Once fields are identified, researchers can then analyze the actors, actions, and power-holders that interact and contest power within it (Fligstein and McAdam 2011; 2012).

The utility of this field approach inheres in its ability to deal with fuzziness across boundaries and concepts (Crossley 2002). It is not deterministic and is thus useful for examining movement practices and forms (Haluza-DeLay 2008). It is useful for analyzing newly emerging contexts. An event-centred, field approach considers assemblages of relations or concepts that correspond to a triggering event which sparks a field or, as seen in Table 2.3, how actions and practices missed by existing concepts fit into the repertoire of power struggles around recent movements. Rather than sticking to our old concepts and parameterizations, we need to move forward by mapping what is done in practice, which in turn can be used to identify the forces that will structure future contentious politics. Only such an approach can fully answer the question of whether social movements are still relevant.

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