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Ana Cristina Santos

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Social Movements and Sexual Citizenship in Southern Europe

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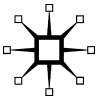

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To Simone:
You could not be any more fabulous.
Hopefully, as you grow up you will remain
happy, loved, caring and
free from sexist and homophobic rubbish

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The image for the cover of the book was taken in January 2010, in front of the Portuguese parliament, minutes after the approval of same-sex marriage. It is significant for many different reasons, including the decisive focus on celebration and activism despite the often inescapable powers of the nation (the flag) and mainstream (hetero)politics (the parliament). I want to thank the photographer Paulete Matos, as well as Joana Manuel and Raquel Freire, for authorizing the use of the picture for this purpose.

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Introduction

Background

Social Movements and Sexual Citizenship in Southern Europe explores the relationship between social movements, sexual citizenship and change in Italy, Spain and Portugal. Providing an analysis about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues in different national contexts, the book discusses how activism can generate and/or influence political, legal and cultural transformations in these post-dictatorial, democratic and EU-focused Southern European countries.

The background of this research dates back to 1998 when I first contacted a LGBT organization in Portugal. I was finishing a BA in Sociology and I had decided to write my final dissertation on sexual identities. The Lesbian and Gay Community Centre, run by ILGA Portugal[1] in Lisbon, had just been launched a year before. After the BA I remained close to the LGBT movement, participating in annual marches, workshops and other events. I took a special interest in the topic of human rights and consequently wrote my MA dissertation in Sociology about the usage of European human rights rhetoric by national LGBT organizations and the implications of using law in activism. I gradually became more and more connected to Portuguese LGBT organizations. I soon started to self-identify as an activist and in 2002, together with friends, I launched an organization called Não te Prives [Don't Deprive] – Group for the Defence of Sexual Rights. One of the aims of this organization was to bridge the gaps between academia and activism, on one hand, and between women's issues and LGBT issues, on the other hand. Since 2002, I have been offered several opportunities to chair meetings and to act as spokesperson in the Portuguese LGBT movement, which I have gladly accepted and interpreted as

a sign of the mutual trust and respect which has built up over the years.

In 2004 I started a doctoral degree in Gender Studies at the University of Leeds. The leitmotif of that research was an interest in understanding the extent to which the demands of the Portuguese LGBT movement had been met successfully, and in what ways this movement had contributed to significant transformations in this field.

This book draws heavily on that doctoral research about the Portuguese LGBT movement. However, for the purposes of the book, the Portuguese case study was expanded by introducing comparative discussions of LGBT activism in Italy and in Spain, as well as by pulling out the main theoretical and methodological contributions this analysis has to offer to the broader fields of social movements and lesbian, gay and queer studies.

Two important disclaimers are in place at this point. The first relates to my use of the category "Southern Europe". Rather than reflecting a mere geographical location, Southern Europe is a heuristic device constructed to encompass many different realities. The choice of countries to include in this book was purely based on pragmatic issues related to access and resources, stemming from previous empirical engagements in Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The other disclaimer stems from the necessarily different ways in which examples from Portugal, on one hand, and those from Italy and Spain, on the other, will be used throughout the book. Most of the empirical data is based on the Portuguese case study, which informs much of the subsequent critical analysis. Hence, for instance, significant advances offered by local authorities in Italy and Spain will not be extensively discussed, as they have no equivalent in Portugal, where the legal and political struggle was always conducted at the state level. Therefore, the Spanish and Italian LGBT movements and context will be used as comparative devices, more than in-depth data sources. Hopefully the discussion offered in this book will be a starting point for further analysis in other national contexts, in Southern Europe and beyond.

Focus and research methods

This book considers political parties, law and media, seeking to evaluate whether there has been a shift in the way each of these areas addresses LGBT issues and to what extent that shift is related to social movements' discourses and praxis. The areas chosen to study the impact of

LGBT activism derive from the recognition of the public space as "an articulated system of decision-making, negotiation and representation", as the sociologist Alberto Melucci argues (1995b: 114). This broad notion of public space proposed by Melucci allows for the inclusion of different dimensions of the LGBT movement. Instead of considering the impact of the movement on individual personal lives, the book explores how these impacts become politically, legally and culturally visible following processes of decision-making, negotiation and representation in which the LGBT movement participated. Following this rationale, three different indicators related to each of those features of public spaces were identified. Hence, *law*, as a mechanism for conferring rights, was considered a field of decision-making; *party politics*, as a site of intervention of different actors whose "value-discourses" (Williams and Roseneil, 2004) may collide, was considered an arena of negotiation; and *media*, as a means of disseminating information targeting wide audiences, was considered a focus of cultural representation. These different dimensions of participation in the public space function as a necessary condition for collective action (i.e. for activism itself) and enhance the "democracy of everyday life" (Melucci, 1995b: 115). Despite focusing on these three areas – legal, political and cultural – I do not mean to suggest that they are mutually exclusive areas of public life or that developments in each area are fully autonomous or self-contained. Instead, based on the analysis of the empirical data I want to acknowledge the strong interconnections among these areas and argue that impacts are reciprocal and influenced by other factors rather than stand-alone phenomena. Therefore, this categorization should be interpreted as an artificial researcher's construct for analytical purposes only.

Methodologically, qualitative research methods were used as the main mode of data collection and analysis. Combining multiple data collection methods facilitates access to evidence from different sources – what is known as triangulation (Hine, 2003; Mason, 1996). This data-generation method offered several advantages. On the one hand, it enhanced the richness of data available for analysis, allowing the integration of sources as diverse as news reports, websites, petitions or interviews, for instance. This diversity revealed a whole range of themes and arguments that were crucial to understanding the movement, thus pushing the analytic process to escape simplistic explanations. Within the limits of what is doable, it could be argued that managing several sources facilitates a more sophisticated account of social movements. As Mason points out, "I think the concept of triangulation – conceived as multiple methods – encourages the

researcher to approach their research questions from different angles, and to explore their intellectual puzzles in a rounded and multifaceted way. This does enhance validity, in the sense that it suggests that social phenomena are a little more than one-dimensional and that your study has accordingly managed to grasp more than one of those dimensions" (1996: 190–191). On the other hand, it also offered several opportunities for gathering participants' views (particularly through interviews and the discussion mailing list), which informed my own interpretation. Documentary analysis of parliamentary debates, for instance, was combined with thematic analysis of the activists' perceptions on political change. Despite these advantages, managing multiple data sources also poses risks, particularly in terms of time-management and the level of complexity deriving from the intersectionality of data. As a result, much of the material collected was not included in the book directly, despite remaining a significant part of the process of accessing additional sources, informing the researcher's knowledge of the field and building rapport and trust between the researcher and participants. In that sense, the whole process of data gathering was extremely important.

The data sources used were of four major types. I started by doing online research using websites of LGBT organizations, blogs, newsletters and thematic mailing lists as primary information-gathering tools, namely for observing discursive strategies, priorities and conflict. In the Portuguese case study, a thematic discussion mailing list called ACTIVISMO was also set up working as an online-extended focus group with LGBT activists for two months.[2]

In addition to online data sources, I have carried out documentary analysis of internal documents of LGBT organizations, of political parties' campaigns and manifestos, of parliamentary debates and of media coverage of the LGBT events and other moments of high visibility of LGBT issues, such as processes of law-making, court cases and political statements.

A third data source was semi-structured interviews conducted with activists and academics. In Portugal, 20 activists from LGBT organizations were interviewed between April and June 2006, and they were all fully transcribed and translated from Portuguese into English.[3] In addition, I have also carried out three exploratory interviews with activists and academics in Italy and in Spain, and maintained regular contact by email or Facebook with six informants in both settings. Such process allowed me to collect accounts of their experience as participants in this social movement (narratives of facts), as well as

their perceptions concerning their role in generating change (narratives of influence – Meyer, 2006), which facilitated the analysis regarding internal transformations of LGBT activism over the past decade.

Finally, between 2005 and 2010, I undertook non-covert participant observation of LGBT events, including marches and prides, workshops, meetings, direct action and so on. LGBT events constitute moments of significant contact between LGBT activism and the wider society. Coalition building, broader involvement of people, social reactions and so on can be observed while taking part in these initiatives. I participated in all of these activities, in some cases as an observer and in other cases as a co-organizer or invited speaker. In all instances, non-covert observation and field notes contributed to making sense of situations and information during the data-analysis process.

Such closeness to the field could raise questions regarding objectivity. Standpoint theorists offer a number of ways in which the notion of objectivity is unpacked (Haraway, 2004; Harding, 2004; Wylie, 2004). I am particularly persuaded by Harding's suggestion that research projects should "use their historical location as a resource for obtaining greater objectivity" (1991: 163). Harding also argues that "Commitment to an objectivity defined as maximizing social neutrality was not itself socially neutral in its effects" (2004: 5). Therefore, I am using a standpoint theory understanding of objectivity, one that "means quite simply situated knowledges" (Haraway, 2004: 86). In this respect, I also concur with Wylie when she states that "objectivity may be substantially improved by certain kinds of situated non-neutrality on the part of practitioners" (2004: 348). When proposing a re-worked notion of objectivity that acknowledges "situated non-neutrality", as Wylie and Harding do, reflexivity is of chief importance. As Melucci points out, "Research is that particular kind of social action where chances or opportunities for self-reflexivity are higher" (1996: 390). The self-reflexive aspect of this study was central at all stages of the research, with particular significance concerning ethical and methodological decisions. In other places I have expanded on the implications of such closeness stemming from the double status as researcher and activist.[4] The next section explores the notion of "scholar-activism" (Santos, 2012a).

Scholar-activism: on disclosure and engagement

By focusing the study on the impact of LGBT social movements, the point of departure for much of the analysis presented in this book is activists' perceptions about the role of the LGBT movement. Instead

of generating meta-theory, the analysis was grounded in empirical research. This is not to say that my analysis was concurrent with activists' views at all times. Instead, I critically engaged with their accounts at the same time that I acknowledged them and integrated them into my own methodological and ethical choices. I was also aware that, as Meyer highlights, social movements' narratives of influence are often more significant to the course of events than to theories of social movements:

> The popular storyline about a movement's impact often does not line up with the scholarly consensus. The popular storyline, however, is far more likely to affect what happens next; the stories people hear about the past influence how they view future possibilities and, most significantly, their prospective role in making it.
>
> (Meyer, 2006: 202)

This argument is in line with Bevington and Dixon, who propose a "movement-relevant approach" as a way to overcome the fact that "dominant social movement theory is not being read by the very movements that it seeks to illuminate" (2005: 186).

Ethically, this book expresses both an epistemological and ontological commitment towards producing politically engaged science, which actively contributes to a deeper understanding of the strengths and limitations of this particular social movement. In line with Bevington and Dixon's concerns (2005) and because activists' perceptions of the success of the movement are indeed relevant to my study, in this book activists' statements are considered as particularly significant, especially their views about what had changed, how and why.

Such approach stems from the principles promoted by public sociology, particularly the works of Gans (2002) and Burawoy (2004, 2005). Underpinning the idea of public sociology is the conviction that knowledge can contribute to inclusion or exclusion, depending on how it is used. A commitment to public sociology, as I understand it (Santos, 2006, 2012a), implies a commitment to activism as a significant part of citizenship and an embracement of politics as an intended effect of knowledge production. The work of Haraway (2004) and Harding (1991, 2004) are also of particular importance for this topic in respect to political engagement, objectivity and the relationship between academia, activism and social change.

Considering my personal experience as researcher and activist in the LGBT movement in Portugal since the late 1990s, I have been

concerned with the epistemological and ethical impacts of being a "scholar-activist" (Santos, 2012a), that is to say someone who is simultaneously an activist and an academic, in the field of sexualities. The writings on public sociology demonstrated the need for academics to interact politically with a world whose realities of exclusion and inequality demand a pro-active role. In accordance with this rationale, knowledge production should be concerned with audiences beyond academia, investing in outreaching initiatives that disseminate research findings in an accessible language and engaging different types of social actors during the process of knowledge production (Ackerly and True, 2010).

Arguably, this type of "double agency" – understood as the politically engaged role of scholar-activists within academia – offers the opportunity to build and disseminate empirically grounded knowledge while maintaining a sense of social responsibility and political engagement. This perspective about the multiple implications and potential of combined work led me to advance the notion of a "queer public sociology", a critical framework that accounts for sexual diversity, and that acknowledges its political situated character at the same time that it contributes to the dismantling of sexual prejudice and exclusion (Santos, 2012a). Queer public sociology has framed, both theoretically and methodologically, much of the contents of this book.

Social movements' impacts: risks and potentialities

Ultimately this book explores the impact of LGBT social movements regarding change in Southern Europe. The reasons behind the emergence of any social movement are diverse, but one shared feature is that they are all purposeful products of collective action, which often have unintentional and contradictory consequences. Studying the impact of social movements is a crucial step towards understanding how collective actors can change, support or resist policies and laws, as well as other forms of social regulation and control that derive, for instance, from the academia, religion or the media.

Nevertheless, the idea of "impact" is not free from problems. On the contrary, identifying social movements' outcomes poses several risks. For instance, recognizing success might deprive activism of the necessary degree of dissatisfaction that stirs up protest, indignation and motivation to change things. It can also lead to a false sense of achievement, thus leading to a void in relation to demands and strategies, as well as a biased assessment of the outcome (Halberstam, 2011). The impact of a progressive legal change can be very different when we

are considering everyday personal lives and discourses instead of social policies, for instance (Haalsa, 2009). Additionally, identifying outcomes could potentially generate a backlash (i.e. unwanted reactions designed to counter-act the movement's achievements). Finally, the study of impacts might fall in the trap of overplaying the role of a specific social movement, putting too much emphasis on linear relations between cause and effect, when collective action is in reality so much messier than that. In fact, assessing impact may be practically unachievable, particularly in situations of multi-causality, when single factors cannot be isolated.

Being aware of the risks and criticisms is fundamental to pursue effectively the study of social movements' impacts. This book casts its gaze over a specific social movement – the LGBT movement – from the point of view of its political, legal and cultural impacts in Italy, Portugal and Spain. There are three main reasons for doing this. Firstly, despite the relatively contained geographical context, Italy, Portugal and Spain offer interesting legal particularities in terms of LGBT issues when compared with other European countries. One example is the fact that Portugal was the first country in Europe and the fourth worldwide to include the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation in its Constitution (which happened in April 2004). Such achievement is in sharp contrast with Italy, where LGBT rights remained fully unrecognized by formal law. Secondly, by choosing to consider its impact on three fields – political, legal and social – I hope to be able to demonstrate that outcomes cannot be understood as stand-alone categories, detached from other factors and arenas. Instead, impacts are relational and change happens through combined strategies and goals. In addition, this reflection highlights that outcomes do not result from linear events, but, rather, from rather complex, ongoing and nuanced processes, which require "more complicated notions of movement success [in order to] understand the effects of social movements" (Bernstein, 2003: 359). In this interplay, the role of social movements in generating change remains largely unacknowledged, which harms not only activists' self-perceptions but also the wider cultural representation regarding the significance of collective action in contemporary societies (Haalsa, 2009; Roseneil, 1995). Finally, the history of the LGBT movement in Southern European countries has not been written about extensively either nationally or internationally. Commenting on the situation of queer studies in academia, Quinlan and Arenas write that "Today, the development of lesbian and gay or queer studies in academia, focusing on the Portuguese and Spanish-speaking worlds, is taking place mostly within

the relatively safe confines of North American universities" (2002: xx). And indeed, despite differences between countries, there is a general tendency towards few publications on this topic, absence of university modules devoted to queer theory or lesbian and gay studies, lack of research centres or MA courses that focus on LGBT issues, and hardly any funded research projects. At an international level, the three chosen Southern European countries are still largely portrayed as Catholic and conservative (Manuel and Tollefsen, 2008; Santos, 2004), which is clearly a rather simplistic and a banal account deserving further inquiry.

In this context, the book's main argument is that the political, legal and cultural transformation in respect to LGBT issues in Portugal, in Spain and, albeit to a much lesser degree, Italy was strongly influenced by this new social movement. Without a critical account of the impact of Southern European LGBT movements, activists will remain deprived from crucial knowledge about their agency and actual potential to implement the change they seek. Therefore, this book is a political project, as much as an academic one.

A substantial part of the analysis on social movements' impact will focus on the Portuguese case study. Despite the similarities and contrasts between Southern European countries, which will be further addressed throughout the book, Portuguese LGBT activism presents specific characteristics worthy of a careful reading. The specificities of Portuguese LGBT activism constitute what I call "syncretic activism", a type of collective action that uses both lobbying and direct action, integrationist and transgressive claims interchangeably. By focusing on common goals, rather than on internal ideological differences, syncretic activism suggests a new and more nuanced approach to the debate about assimilationism and radicalism. Moreover, because the Portuguese LGBT movement has been able to achieve the majority of its collectively set targets in a relatively short period of time, syncretic activism may, arguably, be an important ideological move to generate positive impact. Hopefully the questions raised in this book will be of relevance beyond Southern Europe and the world of academia in general.

Outlining themes and chapters

The book is divided into seven chapters, briefly outlined below.

Chapter 1, *Social movements, queer and citizenship: exploring theoretical intersections*, reviews social movements' literature and lesbian and gay studies and queer theory as major theoretical influences in this book.

Additionally, it also examines the notions of bodily, intimate and sexual citizenship, suggesting that fruitful results may derive from combining different bodies of theory.

Chapter 2, *Political, legal and cultural change in Southern Europe*, starts by situating Italy, Portugal and Spain in the context of a post-dictatorial Southern Europe. Retaining a general focus on politics, law and civil society, this chapter gives particular emphasis to issues of sexual citizenship whenever appropriate. The final sections consider the role of the Catholic Church and of the EU regarding sexual norms and change. This chapter provides the context for the following analytical chapters addressing political, legal and cultural change, respectively.

Chapter 3, *LGBT activism, politicians and political change*, examines the relationship between LGBT organizations and political parties, highlighting the centrality of two major "value-discourses" (Williams and Roseneil, 2004) among politicians: "the family" and "the child". I argue that their resistance to addressing issues of sexual citizenship is based on heteronormative rationales of nature, law, science and worth, which are particularly strong in respect to LGBT claims. This opposition is counterbalanced by a recent shift in the way political parties address LGBT issues. The second section of the chapter explores signs of political change and examines the underlying reasons for them, putting particular emphasis on activists' proactive engagement with political parties in recent years. The last section discusses party politics within the movement, with a particular interest in issues of conflict and dissent.

Chapter 4, *Legal change and the juridification of LGBT activism*, addresses the heteronormative value-discourse of "the family" as particularly important in legal texts and in the way "transformative laws" (Krieger, 2003) become "captured" through the heteronormative interpretation of judges and other legal mediators. In the first part I suggest that LGBT rights face a situation of normative ambiguity – on the one hand, there is largely legal protection from (individual) discrimination; on the other hand, specific laws mirror the heteronormative value-discourses of the lawmaker, preserving the law as a site of (relational) discrimination. Then, I introduce the notions of *individual claims* and *relational claims*, and discuss how relational claims have faced considerably more resistance than individually based ones. The next section examines four key areas that have generated legal claims, struggle and change, namely the (de)criminalization of sexual practices; relationship recognition and parenthood; anti-discrimination; and hate crimes and domestic violence. This chapter concludes by suggesting that the legal focus of the movement has led to a juridification of LGBT issues, with a strong investment

in juridical activism (i.e. changing laws and social policy) and a deficit of judicial activism (e.g. participation in court cases).

Chapter 5, *News is power: activism, the media and cultural change*, explores the ways in which media reports about LGBT activism have changed since the 1990s. After a brief overview of literature on media representations, I identify, and explain, three frames of news reporting of LGBT events: the *entertainment frame*, the *reliable source frame* and the *homophobic/transphobic frame*. The third section looks at the way in which the LGBT movement has related to the media, via what I call the *visibility approach*, the *credibility approach* and the *empathy approach*. The chapter concludes by considering signs of change in the media attention cycles in relation to LGBT activism.

Chapter 6, *Overcoming the dichotomy: the syncretic activist approach*, begins by exploring the debate between assimilationism and radicalism in lesbian, gay and queer studies. In the second section, I discuss two major types of action that the movement has deployed to achieve political, legal and social outcomes – lobbying and direct action. I then suggest a third way of approaching and, perhaps, overcoming the opposition between assimilationism and radicalism, which I designate "syncretic activism", based on my empirical observations and theoretical analysis of LGBT activism. The rationale underpinning syncretic activism is a focus on goals, rather than on ideological positions, which stems from its multiple objectives, strategies and actors, whereby boundaries of outsider and insider are particularly unsettled. As an example of such unsettled boundaries, the last section of this chapter focuses on "queer-straights" (O'Rourke, 2005; Smith, 1997) who are engaged in LGBT activism. Arguably, queer-straight activists constitute a clear example of the syncretic nature of LGBT activism, opening up innovative possibilities for conceptualizing and practising queer activism in the future.

The concluding chapter, *What difference do social movements make?*, combines the theoretical debates and empirical data, offering a synthesis of the core arguments of the book, as well as suggesting new ways of addressing some of the issues covered in this book and identifying areas for future research and political engagement.

1

Social Movements, Queer Studies and Citizenship: Exploring Theoretical Intersections

This book draws on two major sets of theory: social movement studies, on the one hand, and lesbian, gay and queer studies, on the other. The particular choice of these two bodies of literature results from the specificity of the topic discussed in the book – the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) social movement – which clearly contains aspects of interest both to social movement theorists (and activists) and to lesbian, gay and queer studies theorists (and activists).

The two main bodies of literature are located within a wider interest in issues of citizenship, particularly as the notion has shifted to become more inclusive after feminist theoretical and political significant input (Halsaa *et al*., 2012). In addition, because issues of family and personal life sit at the core of LGBT demands in Italy, Portugal and Spain, notions of bodily, intimate and sexual citizenship will be explored towards the end of the chapter.

Early approaches to collective action

Social mobilization and collective action are permanent features of contemporary western human history. Influenced by the work of Gustave Le Bon and his understanding of "the crowd" as chaos and disruption (Le Bon, 1903; Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008), the early theoretical approaches to collective action dealt with social movements as something deviant and transitory; social movements were to be feared, rather than celebrated (Goodwin and Jasper, 2003: 5). These included the Marxist approach, the collective behaviour approach and the structural-functionalist approach to social movements.

Emerging from the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the late 19th century, the Marxist approach focused on the economic aspects of

the binary oppressor/oppressed. Marxism, in its classical forms, argued that class struggle was the main focus of conflict in society, opposing the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This perspective – developed by Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci among others – helped to develop the concepts of resistance, consciousness, interest and mobilization (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008). Yet it bypassed the existence of heterogeneity within each of these two groups. Issues of gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or religion were not regarded as important as class.

A new theoretical trend emerged in the 1940s, the collective behaviour approach, whose predecessors are to be found in the 1920s, especially among symbolic interactionists like G. H. Mead (1863–1931). The landmark work is Herbert Blumer's *Outline of Collective Behaviour*, written in 1934, which highlighted the existence of creative processes ruling collective behaviour and, more specifically, interaction. Change is the main topic for these theorists and they looked to collective action as a way of producing new rules and solidarities. Blumer, for instance, defined social movements as "collective enterprises to establish a new order of life" (1995: 60). His work considered the impact of emotions and identities, while downplaying the role of the societal context (Crossley, 2002).

Talcott Parsons' study of fascist movements in 1942 aimed to explain the rationale underpinning apparently unplanned behaviour. But quite differently from Blumer, Parsons was interested in isolating the structural determinants of collective action, rather than identifying patterns of interaction. Therefore, Parsons led the way to a third theoretical perspective about social movements – the structural-functionalist approach.[1] This perspective emphasized the existence of structural strains that precipitated collective action. Social movements would play a specific role linked to the need to accommodate tension within the wider system. While proposing a wider interpretation of the macro-levels of conflict and mobilization, this approach failed to provide an explanation for the ability of actors to break these cyclical and rather deterministic histories of social tension.[2]

And then came the 1960s with its explosive variety of collective action, hardly anticipated, let alone explained, by the previous theories.

After the 1960s: contemporary perspectives on social movements

> Deep in every discussion of collective action stirs the lava of a volcanic eruption: collective action is about power and politics; it