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METHODOLOGICAL PRACTICES IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT RESEARCH

EDITED BY DONATELLA DELLA PORTA

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Donatella della Porta

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■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A couple of years ago, while walking in the Berliner Gruenewald with a former PhD student I had mentored (now a teacher herself), she told me: “You know, we were talking the other day with two others of your former PhD students about what we have in common, we ‘ddps,’ and we thought, it is the attention to the method.”

It may be that they were right: certainly, this book reflects the methodological awareness that we have long cultivated in the research groups with which I have worked, first at the University of Florence and then at the European University Institute. In a long series of research on social movements of the most different types, I have in fact experimented with most of the empirical techniques available, adopting and adapting from various disciplines and perspectives. In particular, during the *Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of the Society* (Demos) project financed under the FP6 program, we devised specific forms of surveys, frame analysis, web-analysis, focus groups, and participant observation. In my ongoing project on *Mobilizing for Democracy*, financed by an Advanced Scholars’ Grant from the European Research Council, I am using comparative historical analysis, process tracing, oral history, and archival research, as well as protest event analysis and qualitative comparative analysis. I have used in-depth interviews, including life histories, and network analysis, among other methods, in research on political violence. On methods and methodological approaches I have in fact reported in two volumes (*Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Approach*, Cambridge University Press, edited with Michael Keating; and *L'intervista qualitativa*, Laterza, from which I take inspiration also in the present one. Besides my personal experience with a broad array of quantitative and qualitative techniques, I have had the good fortune to supervise about 65 empirical PhD theses and to mentor the empirical work of a couple of dozen post-doctoral fellows, learning from them at least as much as they learned from me.

These experiences and human resources now converge around the Centre on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS), which I direct at the European University Institute in Florence, and to which most of the authors of the various contributions belong. Focusing on social movements as part of broader contentious politics, the center gathers about 30 PhD students and 12 post-doctoral Fellows in residence, plus about as many former PhD students and post-doctoral fellows, to promote theoretically driven empirical analyses on forms, dimensions, causes, and impacts of social movements, in established democracies as well as authoritarian regimes. With members

coming from everywhere in Europe and beyond, the center is a rich and pluralist environment for broad debate on empirical and theoretical matters. Including members with different disciplinary backgrounds—sociology and political science, but also anthropology, political theory, geography, urban studies, gender studies, law, philosophy, and history—Cosmos is also a stimulating arena for methodological reflections.

In this rich environment, some contingencies supported the planning and writing of this volume. In fact, to improve its didactical quality, we have used the complete volume draft in two teaching enterprises. First, the draft chapters were presented to the Cosmos community during a seminar organized in April 2013. Second, in September of the same year, improved drafts were used for teaching an ECPR–Cosmos Summer School at the EUI. I am grateful to the participants in both events for their comments and suggestions, to the two anonymous reviewers, and to Dominic Byatt at Oxford University Press, for very useful and constructive comments. I am also grateful to the European Research Council, which generously supported me in this enterprise through an Advanced Scholars' Grant.

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■ LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Massimiliano Andretta Cosmos and University of Pisa

Phillip M. Ayoub European University Institute and Drexel University

Philip Balsiger Cosmos, European University Institute

Lorenzo Bosi Cosmos, European University Institute

Manuela Caiani Cosmos and Universidad Carlo III, Madrid

Donatella della Porta Cosmos, European University Institute

Nicole Doerr Cosmos and Mount Holyoke College

Swen Hutter Cosmos, European University Institute

Alexandre Lambelet University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland, School of Social Work (HETS/eesp)

Lasse Lindeskilde Cosmos and Aarhus University

Stefan Malthaner Cosmos, European University Institute

Alice Mattoni Cosmos, European University Institute

Stefania Milan Cosmos and University of Toronto

Noa Milman University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Lorenzo Mosca Cosmos and Università Roma Tre

Herbert Reiter Cosmos, European University Institute

Daniel P. Ritter University of Nottingham

Claudius Wagemann Cosmos and Goethe University Frankfurt

Sophia J. Wallace Rutgers University

Chris Zepeda-Millán UC Berkeley

1 Social Movement Studies and Methodological Pluralism: An Introduction

Donatella della Porta

Social movement studies have grown enormously in the past few decades, spreading from sociology and political science to other fields of knowledge as varied as geography, history, anthropology, psychology, economics, law, and others. With the increasing interest in the field, there has also been an increasing need for methodological guidance for empirical research. This volume aims to address this need by introducing the main methods of data collection and data analysis as they have been used in past research on social movements. The focus is on the how-to-do-it, rather than, for example, on reviewing existing research using specific methods. Each chapter of *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* presents specific discussions on the main steps of research using a certain method: from research design to data collection and the use of the information. In this, dilemmas and trade-offs are presented, illustrated mainly by materials from the authors' own research.¹

This chapter introduces the main methodological trends in social movement studies. It suggests that some of its main characteristics as a field of knowledge favored the development of methodological pluralism, with a dialogue between different epistemological approaches and frequent triangulations of methods. It then discusses the main methodological steps in research design that will be addressed in the presentation of each method. Finally, it introduces the structure of the book.

Social Movement Studies as a Pluralist Field

Research on social movements has used very different methods, bridging qualitative and quantitative methodologies. While there has been criticism

and self-criticism related to the planning and implementation of specific methods (from case studies to protest event analysis), no methodological war is recorded.

Methodological pluralism seems indeed to dominate the field (on methodological pluralism, see della Porta and Keating 2008b). While a narrative that is widespread in several subfields in the social sciences tends to present a Manichean picture, pitting positivist versus interpretivist (hermeneutic) views at the epistemological level, or contrasting ontological assumptions about the existence of a real world, social movement scholars tend to develop more nuanced views. Even researchers driven by more neopositivistic assumptions have recognized the importance of the construction of concepts, and constructivists have not predicated abandoning the search for inter-subjective knowledge. Most research has indeed combined attention to structures and perceptions (e.g., political opportunities and the framing thereof) as intimately linked. Similarly, most research in the field has combined some skepticism about the capacity to discover general laws with a desire to go beyond a-theoretical case studies. An inclusive view has indeed brought about cross-fertilization and a certain capacity to build up common knowledge. Inductive and deductive approaches have mostly been combined in this process, as have qualitative and quantitative methodologies, recognizing that “two styles of works do place differing emphasis on the understanding of specific historical or ethnographic cases as opposed to general laws of social interaction. But the two styles also imply one another. Every analysis of a case rests, explicitly or implicitly, on some general laws, and every general law supposes that the investigation of particular cases would show that law at work” (Becker 1996, 53–4). Mixed-method strategies, with a triangulation of different methods, have been widely practiced. And, while few social movement scholars seem to believe either in the neutrality of science or in its subjection to political aims, the degree of political commitment promoted in scientific work has varied on a continuum, with interesting normative and ethical debates. In fact, as this volume shows, social movement studies have been very pragmatic in the use of all techniques potentially available for data collection and data analysis. So, the “absence of methodological dogmatism” (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002a, xii) has been praised as a beneficial characteristic of the field of social movement studies, as “a full range of methods has been fruitfully applied in the study of social movements” (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002a; see also 2002b).

This pluralist attitude might have various explanations. First, given the lack of reliable databases (as one may find, for instance, for studies on elections or on social stratification), social movement scholars need to invest in data collection through various techniques. Existing surveys on the entire

population are of little help for investigations of active minorities, and social movement organizations rarely keep archives, or even lists of participants. Importing and adapting methods of data gathering and data analysis from other fields, as well as inventing new ones, appears therefore as a necessity for challenging empirical analysis.

Second, it has often been observed that social movement scholars have tended to focus attention on social movements to which they are themselves sympathetic. In fact, “To a much greater degree than in related areas, like voting or interest groups’ behavior, social movement scholars knew and shared the concerns of those they studied” (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002, 318). This has often brought about a normative urgency towards a knowledge oriented towards not only scientific theorization, but also towards societal intervention. Together with demands from the field, suggestions also came for co-research planned together with the object of the study, and related methodological reflections (e.g., Touraine 1981).

Third, problem-oriented, rather than method-oriented, social movement studies have been open to different research techniques. As in other fields of studies endowed with similar characteristics (such as, e.g. gender studies or queer studies), social movement studies have been very pragmatic about the means through which to collect that knowledge. Theoretical disputes and innovations have not developed into methodological wars, but rather have “encouraged scholars to use a variety of methods, build on one another’s research findings and constructively criticize each other’s theoretical perspective” (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002, 315).

Fourth, social movement studies have also been quite eclectic in theoretical terms. As they emerged through the bridging of different disciplinary approaches—from symbolic interactionism to organizational sociology, from sociological theory to political science—they have constructed their toolkit of concepts and hypotheses by combination and cross-fertilization. This has made them more open in methodological terms too, as social movement scholars became acquainted not only with a variety of disciplinary approaches, but also with the methodological practices that had been widespread within them. In fact, a main basis for the success of social movement studies in terms of capacity to expand and reputation for sound research has been singled out in “its characteristic openness to criticism and new approaches, but only in so far as this has been accompanied by a readiness to put new ideas to the empirical test” (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002a, ix).

Fifth, given an emphasis on middle-range theory, rather than the search for grand theory or mere empiricism (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002, 317), interdisciplinary cross-fertilization has contributed to these methodological innovations. In fact, the infusion of multiple inputs from various disciplines and new trends within them (from history from below

to gender studies) has enriched the field from the theoretical and methodological perspectives. While controversies have existed, and taken sometimes harsh tones, they have rarely developed into incommunicability; rather, they have been beneficial in “exposing weaknesses in the field and directing scholars to clarify ideas, develop new evidences, and adjust concepts and propositions” (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002, 320).

While these developments have been overall positive, by-and-large avoiding methodological wars and contributing instead to reciprocal enrichment, there are some shortcomings. First and foremost, there has been little methodological reflection. Problem-oriented rather than method-oriented, social movement studies have occasionally discussed the advances and limits of specific techniques (such as protest event analysis, e.g., Koopmans and Rucht 2002; surveys at demonstrations, e.g., Fillieule and Blanchard 2008; or network analysis, Diani 2002), but rarely engaged in broader methodological debates. Methodological pluralism seemed to emerge naturally, rather than as a conscious choice. New methods have entered the field through a process of stratification, rather than critical engagement vis-à-vis the old.

Notwithstanding the exponential growth of the discipline, there have in fact been only two efforts to put together methodological introductions: *Studying Social Movements*, edited by Mario Diani and Ron Eyerman in 1992, and *Methods of Social Movement Research*, edited by Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg ten years afterwards. No in-depth discussion of methodological practices is provided in any of the general introductions to social movements (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Snow, Kriesi, and Soule 2004; della Porta and Diani 2006; Staggenborg 2011). The recent *Encyclopedia of Political and Social Movements*, edited by David Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam (Snow, della Porta, Klandermans, and McAdam 2013), includes only short entries on some methods, and no methodological discussion is covered in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Social Movement Studies* (della Porta and Diani forthcoming).

This volume aims to fill this gap at a moment when this seems most opportune, given the development of social movement studies well beyond sociology, political science, or history. In particular, recent waves of protest, such as the global justice movement of the beginning of the millennium and the anti-austerity movements ten years later, have in fact attracted the attention of scholars from the most different disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, geography, economics, law, normative theory, and international relations. While this process is extremely positive, in that it introduces new ideas and perspectives, it also requires some shared basic knowledge, including on methodological issues. Moreover, as new generations of scholars enter the field with new interests and skills, spaces for cross-fertilization are all the more necessary.

Methods within Research Designs

In this volume, we aim to provide these basic resources by presenting a critical view of methodological practices in social movement research. For each chapter covering a specific method, we address all the important steps in its use within research.

Following a pluralist approach (della Porta and Keating 2008b and 2008c), we do not assume that there is a neat cleavage in the social sciences between consistent pillars involving ontological, epistemological, and methodological preferences. Rather, we observe that most methods have been used within various ontological and epistemological preferences. To give some examples, ethnographic methods have been adopted by those scholars who believe in observing reality, as well as by those who focus on social construction; life histories have been used to collect information on specific events, as well as to study memories; in-depth interviews and surveys have often been triangulated in an attempt to reduce specific bias.

At the same time, we believe that each method has specific strengths and weaknesses of which one needs to be aware when planning research. In other words, the fit between research questions and empirical instruments is of central importance for any successful project. Additionally, while all research methods need to be embedded in a research design where issues of theorization, conceptualization, case selection, and choices of methods are connected, these steps are addressed differently in research using different methods.

Let us start with the broad discussion on quantitative and qualitative methodologies, or large-*n* and small-*n* studies. Each method has to address the main steps in a research design, usually defined as “a plan that shows, through a discussion of our model and data, how we expect to use our evidence to make inferences” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 118). Main steps for all include:

- the selection of the problem;
- the theoretical references;
- the selection of cases;
- conceptualization;
- the choices of methods.

Some differences in the implementation of a research design are linked to the specific characteristic of some methods. In general, it has been observed that, while research using quantitative instruments needs to strictly separate these steps, when using qualitative methods the procedures are more flexible (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2). In research based upon quantitative methods, the very instruments for the empirical analysis are built upon the theoretical models, as concepts have to be operationalized into variables, and these

Table 1.1 Some Differences Between Designing Research When Using Quantitative versus Qualitative Methodologies

Dimensions	Quantitative (large N)	Qualitative (small N)
Research strategy	Structured	Unstructured
Format of research design	Rigid design	Emerging design
Relationship between theory/ concepts and research	Confirmation	Emergence
Relations between cases	Assumes independence	Looks at processes of interactions
Selection criteria	Statistical representativity	Substantive representativity— paradigmatic cases
Types of concept	Operationalized	Orientative
Data collection tool	Standard (same for all units of analysis)	Adapted (varies for each unit of analysis)
Aggregation of data	Variables (cases are anonymous)	Cases (with capital letter) and casing

Table 1.2 Some Differences in Implementing Research Design When Using Quantitative versus Qualitative Methodologies

	Quantitative	Qualitative
<i>In the field:</i>		
Relations researcher/subject	Distant	Close
Researcher stance in relation to subject	Outsider	Insider
<i>Data analysis:</i>		
Type of data	Number	Words
Nature of data	Hard, reliable	Rich, deep
Type of knowledge	Testing causal relations	Explaining
Procedures for data analysis	Formal	Informal
Procedures	Count	Interpret
Relationship between dimensions	Causal/effects (external)	Mutual understanding (internal)
Main focus	Causation	Classification
<i>Data presentation:</i>		
Format	Cross-tabulation and correlation index	Dense narrative
Type of knowledge	Generalizing	Understanding
Explanation as	Statistical correlation	Meaning
Context	Context-free	Context-bound

to be measured (della Porta and Keating 2008b; della Porta 2010). This also means that theories and concepts pre-exist the empirical analysis. In research using qualitative methods, instead the research problems are constructed in part during the empirical work, during which new concepts might emerge. Also, case selection tends to be random (or made using approximately random criteria) when using quantitative analysis, as the aim is for the sample to represent the universe. This is not the case when using qualitative methods, which aim instead to cover cases that are theoretically relevant. The lack of a standardized means for data gathering allows researchers using qualitative

methods to adapt their instruments according to the empirical research. Finally, while the use of statistics for data analysis requires an assumption of the independence of units and variable-based analysis, qualitative analysis tends to see cases in a more holistic view.

Some differences between research using qualitative and quantitative methods also emerge during fieldwork. While contacts with the research object are more rare when using quantitative methodologies, they are instead intense in most qualitative analysis. And while quantitative analysis tends to separate sharply between the observer and the observed, some empathy is unavoidable when using qualitative analysis. The analysis of the results also tends to take on different nuances, being driven by a preference for numbers when using quantitative techniques, while qualitative techniques provide dense narratives—and are in fact more challenging from the point of view of a synthetic narrative. Hard data are contrasted with soft ones, systematic accounts with dense (Bryman 1988), even if “messy and unorganized.” Procedures for data analysis are in fact better codified and oriented to test causal relations in quantitative analyses than in qualitative ones, and considered stronger for discovering the meanings actors give to their actions.

These are, however, only general trends, as in reality research design and implementation tend to locate themselves on continuums on each dimension, rather than being conceived in a polarized way. In what follows we pay attention to the specificities in the implementation of research designs through qualitative and quantitative methodologies, going even further in the discussion of several different quantitative and qualitative techniques. In fact, we show that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative could be misleading if it serves to hide the internal differences within each camp as well as the similarities and potential combinations. The opposition between qualitative and quantitative methods has created much tension in political science and sociology. As Mahoney and Goertz noted, “Comparing differences in qualitative and quantitative research in contemporary political science entails traversing sensitive ground. Scholars associated with either tradition tend to react defensively and in exaggerated ways to criticism or perceived mischaracterization of their assumptions, goals and practices. The possibilities for misunderstanding are manifold. Misunderstandings are enhanced by the fact that the labels quantitative and qualitative do a poor job capturing the real differences between the traditions” (Mahoney and Goertz 2006, 245). However, pitting the two camps as fighting each other on a battlefield is grossly misleading. In fact, while “in a very general sense, we can talk of a distinction between hard methods (usually based on a positivist epistemology and a belief in the reality of social concepts) and soft methods (relying more on interpretation). Yet matters are in practice a great deal more complicated, with different forms of information being suitable for different forms of analysis. There is scope for combining methods through triangulation, but,

in order to do this, we need to be clear of the assumptions that underlie each and to understand that they are not incompatible” (della Porta and Keating 2008c, 4).

This recognition of complementarity does not imply any attempt at building a unified social science, but rather aims to improve opportunities for cross-fertilization, based on knowledge of and respect for different traditions. This counters the idea that there is only one approach (and thus one paradigm) in the social sciences, a common ideal to which any actual quantitative and qualitative research should aim. In this direction, King, Keohane, and Verba (1994, 6) provided the following definition of “scientific research” as applicable to both quantitative and qualitative research:

1. The goal is inference. Scientific research is designed to make descriptive or explanatory inferences on the bases of empirical information about the world. . . .
2. The procedures are public. Scientific research uses explicit, codified, and public methods to generate and analyze data whose reliability can therefore be assessed. . . .
3. The conclusions are uncertain. . . .
4. The content is the method. . . . scientific research adheres to a set of rules of inference on which its validity depends.

These general rules, as applied in their methodological suggestions, tend, however, to propose the standards for quantitative analysis as universal, pointing at the *de facto* weaknesses of qualitative research to reach those standards and misrecognizing its many comparative strengths. In particular, the rich methodological debates in both qualitative and quantitative areas tend to remain confined within each field.

In this volume, we instead consider the social sciences as non-paradigmatic, assuming that “there never can be one hegemonic approach and set of standards, but that the social world is to be understood in multiple ways, each of which may be valid for specific purposes; or even that it is multiparadigmatic, with different paradigms either struggling against each other or ignoring each other.” In fact, we agree that “it is possible to encompass much of the field, not by imposing a single truth, but by setting certain standards of argumentation and debate while recognizing that there are differences in approaches and types of evidence. Although these do not inevitably constitute fundamentally different world views, they are not necessarily all compatible. Researchers need to be aware of the various approaches, the differences among them, and the extent to which they can be combined” (della Porta and Keating 2008b, 21).

This means challenging a vision in which each method necessarily belongs to a certain epistemological and ontological pillar, and instead presenting each method within the different conception to which it has contributed.

Competing approaches are often contrasted according to their *ontological* base, related to *what* we study, the object of investigation, with debates on the existence of a real and objective world; their *epistemological* base, related to the *how* we know things, with controversies on the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge; and a *methodological* base, which links preferences for specific technical instruments to broader theories of knowledge, and then techniques for data collection and data analysis (della Porta and Keating 2008b; see also Crotty 1998; Corbetta 2003; Silverman 2006). In this sense, it would be a simplification to assume that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative methods overlaps with that between positivist and interpretivist epistemologies: “Questions about methods do, however, come together with epistemology and theory in discussions about *methodology*, which refers to the way in which methods are used” (della Porta 2008; della Porta and Keating 2008b).

In fact, the argument that social sciences must have a consistent set of ontologies and epistemologies owes a lot to the natural sciences and a related conception of knowledge as consistent and cumulative. It is assumed in this analogy that science is about generating theories that reflect the material world as accurately as possible. In reality, however, the natural sciences have also gone on for long periods without agreement on some of the fundamental building blocks of knowledge (della Porta and Keating 2010).

It is therefore misleading to imagine neatly separated borders between ontology, epistemology, and methodology. In fact, “While a researcher may prefer to use one to the relative exclusion of the other, if the research problem invites a combined approach there is little to prevent such a strategy, other than the usual reasons of time, money and possibly inclination” (Bryman 1988, 107). Many empirical researchers hardly reflect on ontological implications or have elaborated epistemological views—rather, “Researchers were able to produce highly regarded ethnographic studies without recourse to the programmatic statements surrounding qualitative research” (Bryman 1988, 124). In general,

We are not faced . . . with a stark choice between words and numbers, or even between precise and imprecise data; but rather with a range from more to less precise data. Furthermore, our decision about what level of precision is appropriate in relation to any particular claim should depend on the nature of what we are trying to describe, on the likely accuracy of our descriptions, on our purposes and on the resources available to us; not on ideological commitments to one methodological paradigm or another. (Hammersley 1992, 163)

In sum, this volume shares the assumption that:

The methodological question refers to the instruments and techniques we use to acquire knowledge. At one level, this is independent of the ontological and epistemological questions just discussed, since there are multiple ways of acquiring each type of knowledge. In practice, they tend to be linked, since positivistic social science

lends itself naturally to “hard” methods, seeking unambiguous data, concrete evidence and rules and regularities, while more interpretive approaches require “softer” methods allowing for ambiguity and contingency and recognizing the interplay between researcher and the object of research. (della Porta and Keating 2008b, 25–6)

The range of methodological debates is therefore broad, and endowed with several (not entirely overlapping) cleavages, as

Partisans articulate their positions with passion and intensity, yet the nature of what divides them is hard to pin down. At times we hear of a stand-off between “qualitative” scholars, who make use of archival research, ethnology, textual criticism, and discourse analysis and “quantitative” scholars, who deploy mathematics, game theory, and statistics. Scholars in the former tradition supposedly disdain the new, hyper-numerate approaches to political science as opaque and overly abstract, while scholars of the latter stripe deride the “old” ways of studying politics as impressionistic and lacking in rigor. At other times the schism is portrayed as being about the proper aspiration of the discipline—between those who believe that a scientific explanation of political life is possible, that we can derive something akin to physical laws of human behavior, and those who believe it is not. . . at still other times the rivals are portrayed as “rational choice theorists,” whose work is animated by the assumption that individuals are rational maximizers of self-interest (often economics, sometimes not) and those who allow for a richer range of human motivations. (Shapiro, Smith, and Masoud 2004, 1)

In sum, in social movement studies as in others, the opposite narratives that describe the social sciences either as institutionalizing towards a positivistic vision or as resisting it are both misleading (della Porta and Keating 2008a). Social science being a collective endeavor, it is instead important to facilitate communication between scholars using different methods, or even subscribing to different methodologies and epistemological views. With this volume, we hope to contribute to a broader mutual understanding.

The Contents of *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*

Each of the chapters in *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research* addresses a specific methodological practice, which implies the presentation of the technical aspects of the method, but also the specific academic *habitus* that has developed around it. Each author has been invited to write on a method with which s/he is very familiar, having used it extensively in his/her own work. Chapters are developed around a common structure, with an introduction, including the definition of the method and a short review of its use in social movement studies; a part on designing the research, addressing

theoretical implications, conceptualization, and case selection; a part on the implementation of the research, addressing the main dilemmas in data collections; and a part on how to use the data, discussing their analysis and presentation.

While recognizing that the distinction among research designs, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis is not always neat, the volume starts with chapters that speak more to general design, followed by those mainly focusing on data collection and then those which include more reflections on data analysis.

In Chapter 2, Alice Mattoni (2014) looks at the potentials of *grounded theory* in the study of social movements. She suggests that grounded theory is an encompassing research strategy that is widely used in the social sciences, but is still disregarded in social movement studies, where it has received scant, if any, attention. The chapter starts with an overview of empirical research based on grounded theory to illustrate its potential for scholars interested in studying grassroots contentious politics. In particular, it shows that two foundational traits of grounded theory—the attention to meanings produced by social actors, paired with systematic and comparative coding procedures—render this research strategy suitable for empirical investigations of perceptions, identities, emotions and, more in general, the cultural dimensions of social movements. First, the chapter briefly presents some of the general traits of grounded theory, including the use of sensitizing concepts and the features characterizing the constructivist approach to this research strategy. It then discusses data collection and data analysis in grounded theory, casting light on the peculiar coding procedures that characterize it. The conclusions summarize the main features of grounded theory to clarify in which cases this research strategy can be fruitfully employed to investigate social movements.

In Chapter 3, Claudius Wagemann (2014) presents *Qualitative Comparative Analysis* (QCA), which has been established as an important addition to the methodological repertoire of the social sciences over the past 25 years. The chapter departs from the observation that QCA can be understood both as a research design in the set-theoretic tradition and as a technique that is built on Boolean and fuzzy algebra. QCA is then placed in the general debate on comparative research designs, discussing in detail what is comparative about it; what is analytical; and what is qualitative. It illustrates how researchers can derive statements on the sufficiency and necessity of conditions, and how QCA also informs about the rather sophisticated causal patterns of INUS and SUIN conditions. This is linked to a discussion about the equifinal, conjunctural, and asymmetric character of causality in QCA. The chapter also includes a presentation of the various steps needed in research based on QCA, namely calibration, the analysis of necessary conditions, the conversion of data matrices into truth tables, the assessment of sufficiency through the parameter of consistency, and the minimization of truth tables. Some studies

on social movements or adjacent fields are introduced in order to show the applicability of the approach.

In Chapter 4, Phillip M. Ayoub, Sophia Wallace, and Chris Zepeda-Millán (2014) analyze *triangulation in social movement research*. Given the dynamic nature of contentious politics and the array of research methods that can be used to study it, it is not surprising that prominent social movement scholars have promoted the use of multiple data sources and collection methods, or *triangulation*, when conducting research. Alongside the many merits of triangulation, the chapter introduces several complexities related to systematically combining and analyzing different types of data in unison. The authors address these concerns with illustrative examples of how to select and effectively apply the appropriate methods with which to answer a given research question. Drawing examples from their own work on transnational LGBT rights movements in Europe and the US immigrant rights movement, they demonstrate empirically how the use of multiple methods, data sources, and levels of analysis can shed light on often-neglected areas of social movement research, such as the diffusion of norms across borders, and the relationship between time, space, and protest.

In Chapter 5, Daniel Ritter (2014) addresses the use of *comparative historical analysis* in the study of social movements and revolutions. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the method by discussing its origins and its logic, as well as its compatibility with the objectives of social movement and revolution research. The second part of the chapter provides the reader with a practical guide to “doing comparative historical analysis” by highlighting five main steps in the research process: 1) the formulation of a puzzle; 2) the identification of useful data; 3) the “mining” of that data; 4) the data analysis; and 5) the writing process. The section also emphasizes the use of modern technology in the research process. Rather than providing a blueprint for comparative historical work, the chapter is meant to inspire others to think creatively about comparative historical analysis and devise their own research strategies.

Chapter 6, written by Lorenzo Bosi and Herbert Reiter (2014), is instead devoted to *historical data*. The chapter departs from the observation that, while historical data have been very often used in social movement research, methodological reflections are rare. The authors therefore address inter-related research questions concerning historical approaches in social movement research. What kind of specific difficulties are social movement scholars bound to encounter when using historical materials? How do social movement scholars use and interpret such materials? What can social movement scholars learn specifically from historiography? In order to provide answers to these questions, they survey different kinds of data collection and investigation, taking up current debates on archival sources, printed sources (including newspapers), oral history, and so on. In the discussion of these issues, they draw especially on their own empirical work on contentious politics in

Germany, Italy, and Northern Ireland, in particular the history of the First of May since 1890, the civil rights movement, and political violence between the 1960s and 1980s.

Philip Balsiger and Alexandre Lambelet (2014) address, in Chapter 7, *participant observation*. They start by noting that a growing number of scholars use participant observation when studying movements: through active participation, researchers attempt to gain insights into mobilization processes as they take place, and understand activism from within. The chapter aims, in fact, to present this method and to offer a practical guide to doing participant observation in social movements. An introductory section addresses how participant observation has been used in social movement studies, defines the method, and situates it historically. The authors then guide the reader through the different stages of a typical piece of research using participant observation—“preparation of observation,” “when on the field,” and “analyzing observations”—and discuss the main methodological issues that arise, using examples from their own work and from ethnographic studies analyzing movements. This leads them on to approach issues like multi-sited ethnography, how to get in contact with the field, what roles the researcher plays, reflexivity and interaction with activists, what to observe, and how to learn from participating, note taking, or generalization. Overall, the chapter discusses the numerous methodological choices and problems researchers typically encounter when doing participant research on social movements.

In Chapter 8, Stefan Malthaner (2014) addresses the main choices and dilemmas of *fieldwork* by focusing on the most difficult settings for research. While many settings can be “hostile” environments for social science research, violent conflicts and authoritarian regimes pose particular challenges for fieldwork. As a result of political polarization and the breakdown of trustful social relationships, high levels of surveillance and control by government agents or non-state armed groups, or because of insecurity and unpredictability in violence-ridden contexts, researchers may face problems in negotiating access, difficult field relations, and threats to the security of their respondents and themselves. In addition to ethical issues, these obstacles raise questions of sampling bias, and the validity of results obtained. Rather than considering field research in the context of violent conflict and authoritarian regimes merely in terms of its shortcomings, the chapter emphasizes that access negotiations constitute an analytical resource and that different settings offer opportunities as well as obstacles and restrictions. It also lists some practical recommendations for applying methods and dealing with moral dilemmas and matters of security.

In Chapter 9, Lasse Lindekilde (2014) discusses *discourse and frame analysis*, formulated initially as a theoretical critique of the dominant resource mobilization perspective as scholars of social movements began to pay attention to the cognitive mechanisms by which grievances are interpreted,

and how consensus around the goals of political activism was constructed and mobilized in the early 1980s. New and more linguistic, cognitive, and discourse-sensitive methodological approaches to the study of social movements were thus developed. These approaches to the in-depth study of qualitative data in the area of social movement studies are the focus of this chapter, which presents discourse and frame analyses as two closely related techniques, based on similar ontological and epistemological assumptions, but which can serve different purposes in the tool kit of social movement scholars. The chapter provides in fact a comparison of and introduction to the two approaches, offering a road map to the development and implementation of research designs using the two techniques, including discussion of definitions and aims of the methods, conceptualization and theoretical implications, sampling and data collection, and extensive examples of data analysis and data presentation.

Chapter 10, by Donatella della Porta (2014a), analyzes *in-depth interviews*, defined as a fundamental tool for generating empirical knowledge through asking people to talk about certain themes. In social movement studies, the relative scarcity of systematic collections of documents or reliable databases gives in-depth interviews even more importance. The chapter looks at the main approaches that have made use of qualitative interviews, observing that they have been preferred especially where the researcher is aiming to make a detailed description, attention is paid to the process, and interest taken in the interpretations interviewees give of the process itself. In social movement studies, in-depth interviews have provided information on (and from) rank-and-file activists, on which few alternative sources are available, and have been of fundamental importance for the study of motives, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as the identities and emotions of movement activists. The chapter addresses the methodological issues referring to the different steps of a research design based on in-depth interviews, with attention to the specific challenges of research on social movements. First, it addresses general dilemmas referring to the questions to ask and the way to ask them. It then discusses strategies for the selection of interviewees, based mainly on theoretical considerations rather than randomness. Further, it reflects on the delicate relations between interviewers and interviewees, on good practices, possible mistakes, and existing trade-offs. It ends with some reflections about how in-depth interviews are analyzed by social movement researchers. Throughout, the author's research on the policing of protest is referred to in order to illustrate the various points.

In Chapter 11, Donatella della Porta (2014b) looks at a specific type of in-depth interview: *life histories*. Defined as a particular type of in-depth interview in which a subject tells about his/her life, life histories are widespread in research on deviance, youth, and families, but less so in political sociology and political science, as well as in social movement studies. Nevertheless,

the chapter suggests, their use is very promising in social movement studies, especially for those who are interested in the ways in which historical events and individual lives are intertwined, as well as in activists' construction of external reality. The chapter addresses the different phases of research, and the main dilemmas in each, when using life histories: from theories and concepts, to the research outline, the selection of the interviewees, the relations between interviewer and interviewee during the interview itself, and the analysis of the empirical results. It discusses the main topics to be addressed in a narration, the main reasons behind the selection of partners, and the best ways to contact them, and the special challenges of developing a balanced relationship between interviewers and interviewees in the discussion of often very delicate issues. Finally, it provides some examples of the analysis and presentation of materials collected through life histories. The author's research on militants in clandestine political organizations is referred to during the chapter.

In Chapter 12, Donatella della Porta (2014c) presents *focus groups* as a technique of data collection based on discussions within a small group, moderated by a researcher, and oriented to obtain information on a specific topic. The chapter departs from the discussion of the main theoretical questions focus groups might help answer, with particular attention to the analysis of collective identities—a central topic for social movement research. In addressing the method's implementation, the author notes that, based on a modality of discussion among equals, focus groups allow us to recreate—almost as in an experiment—conditions similar to those considered as belonging to paths of opinion formation, particularly in social movements. The chapter then discusses the different methodological challenges met when using group interviews in social movement studies, looking at major milestones such as the preparation of the outline, the selection of participants, the conducting of the group interview, and the analysis of the transcriptions. Some classic social movement studies, as well as the author's own research on social forums, are referred to in order to illustrate the trade-offs of the various choices.

In Chapter 13, Massimiliano Andretta and Donatella della Porta (2014) address the *surveying* of social movement activists. The chapter starts with the observation that, some 15 years after select scholars argued that a “strange lacuna” in social movement studies—the paucity of research based on surveys—was over: activists' characteristics and motivations are more and more often investigated within international projects thanks to the use of surveys during protest events. Originally thought of as a methodological device to capture the degree of overlap between the ideological themes of the movement and the individual beliefs of demonstrators, the survey has since been used for addressing a larger number of research questions concerning individuals getting involved in collective action, becoming an established methodology. The chapter discusses some of the main challenges in the use of the

(very established) survey method during protest events. It discusses problems and solutions referring to bias in the implementation of random sampling, ways to control response bias, main trade-offs in the preparation of the questionnaires, as well as main caveats in the analysis of results. The authors' own use of surveys in research on the global justice movement at the beginning of the millennium as well as during protests in times of austerity are referred to by way of illustration.

In Chapter 14, Swen Hutter (2014) discusses another quantitative technique often used in social movement studies: *Protest Event Analysis (PEA) and its offspring*, as a form of quantitative content analysis. In contrast to most other methods presented in this volume, PEA is a key methodological innovation that emerged within the social movement field and has more recently been adapted and refined to study other research topics. The chapter starts by briefly summarizing four generations of PEA research: the history ranges from the initiators in the 1960s to the latest generation, which has shifted from protest events to alternative coding units, either by covering a broader set of units (e.g., political claims) or by disentangling single events. While this part highlights the wide range of questions that can be addressed by PEA and its offspring, the bulk of the chapter is devoted to the “how to” questions: moving from data collection to data analysis. Among others, it discusses the main questions faced by any scholar who wants to conduct a PEA when it comes to the coding unit, the sampling unit, and the coding process. Overall, the chapter underscores that PEA is (still) a very powerful and flexible tool for social research. However, every scholar needs to make fundamental decisions that are based on both research interests and more pragmatic considerations.

Chapter 15, by Manuela Caiani (2014), addresses *Social Network Analysis (SNA)*, considered as particularly interesting for the study of social movements, which are networks whose formal characteristics have been referred to in the development of theories of collective behavior. Indeed, network analysis enables the researcher to emphasize the meso level of social analysis, filling the gap between structure and agency, and connecting the micro and macro dimensions of social movements. The chapter presents this method and offers empirical examples of how to apply social network analysis in social movement research. The introduction gives an overview of the theoretical background of SNA, discussing the main characteristics, as well as the advantages and challenges, of this approach. In the second section, the issues of research design and conceptualization when adopting SNA are discussed alongside the differences between social network data and “conventional” sociological data. In the third section, the main dilemmas of sampling and data collection are addressed. Finally, the last two sections draw on research on the multi-organizational field of the extreme right to empirically show how to study networks at a macro level by discussing the structural properties of the whole network; at a micro level by showing

the characteristics and relational resources of single groups or organizations (nodes); and finally at a meso level by focusing on subgroups of nodes and their coalitional dynamics within the network.

Online research is addressed, in Chapter 16, by Lorenzo Mosca (2014). Despite the growing role of new media in mobilizing protest and even changing its logic, reflections on online methods for studying activism, protest, and social movements have been quite limited until now. Although a few recent books address the topic, at least partially, the most recent handbooks on social movement studies do not take into account the issue of online methods per se. The chapter thus aims to fill this gap in the literature. While social movement studies have not devoted enough attention to online methods, there are plenty of publications in the social sciences that provide useful insights when reflecting on online methods for studying social movements. Some of them focus on specific techniques (i.e., digital ethnography), while others address both quantitative and qualitative online methods. In presenting them, the chapter covers (a) the methodological problems related to archiving online data; and (b) the overall picture of online methods for researching social movements; providing a specific focus on (c) online surveys; and (d) digital ethnography.

In Chapter 17, Nicole Doerr and Noa Milman (2014) introduce *working with images*. They observe that visual analysis has become a field of growing attention, attracting a generation of students interested in the visual dimension of protest in the context of globalized societies, Internet communication, social media, and repeating waves of transnational diffusion. Social movements have always worked with symbols and visual posters or signs. However, most social movement scholars have focused on text-based concepts, methods, and materials, without considering images as an “independent variable” structuring the dynamics of political conflict and its framing in public discourse. To fill this empirical gap, the chapter presents an interdisciplinary body of methods of visual analysis, to explore the actors and strategies behind visual mobilization, their constraints, cultural resources, and the impact of symbolic struggles in broader media arenas and individual participation.

Last but not least, Chapter 18 deals with *the ethics of social movement research*. Stefania Milan (2014) starts with Karl Marx’s observation that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” At the dawn of the twenty-first century, she observes, his verdict is still valid for students of social movements, who face a constant tension between objectivity and subjectivity, detachment and full participation. With the progressive institutionalization of social movement research, scholars have increasingly (and rightly so) concentrated on theory development, partially at the expense of a fruitful connection with their research subjects. As a result, “movement theorists often speak to themselves (. . .) the field often produces work that is distant from, and irrelevant to, the very struggle

it purports to examine. The consequence is an artificial divide between the practice of social change and the study of such efforts” (Croteau et al. 2005, xii–xiii). The chapter addresses the ethics of studying social movements by reflecting on the costs and benefits of the “artificial divide” of which Croteau and colleagues spoke, and addresses the methodological and epistemological consequences of ethical choices in social movement research. It explores the tension between “research about” (social groups, processes, events) and “research with” (i.e., in collaboration with) the subjects under study. It investigates the differences in organizational cultures that might hinder collaboration, and suggests how to overcome them. It illustrates the potential risks to which research can expose social movement activists, and how to avoid harming individuals and groups. Finally, it addresses the ethno-methodologist’s concern with bringing the findings back to the field.

■ NOTE

1. This volume has been produced on the basis of a seminar on methods for research in social movements, which was organized as part of the activities of the ERC advanced researchers’ grant I received for my project on Mobilizing for Democracy.

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2 The Potentials of Grounded Theory in the Study of Social Movements

Alice Mattoni

An Introduction to the Origins of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an encompassing qualitative research strategy that can be used to develop concepts that emerge from the empirical data through a comparative coding process, holding a central position in the analysis. Far from being a specific method to collect and analyze data, grounded theory is best understood as a “family of methods” (Bryant and Charmaz 2010, 11) able to guide researchers in the systematic elaboration of concepts and theories that are rooted in the empirical materials at the center of the investigation.

Grounded theory began to develop in the 1960s when Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, two sociologists in the field of health and nursing studies, conducted a qualitative investigation on the meaning and awareness of dying for patients affected by terminal illness (Glaser and Strauss 1965). The result was not only a seminal work on the subject matter, but also a preliminary sketch of what soon became a consistent and systematic research strategy that could be used to investigate a variety of empirical phenomena (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Elaborated in a period in which qualitative methods were in the middle of a deep credibility crisis, grounded theory quickly became a popular research strategy in the social sciences (Charmaz 2006). In offering a clear array of guidelines to undertake systematic qualitative studies, it showed that qualitative methods could go beyond the analytical description of social realities: through the systematic analysis of data, scholars using grounded theory were able to elaborate explanatory abstractions grounded in the empirical materials. Conceptualization, indeed, is at the core of grounded theory (Glaser 2008). In their seminal work on the meaning of dying, for instance, Glaser and Strauss (1965) theorized the importance of the contexts

of awareness amongst relatives of patients affected by terminal illness and the medical teams taking care of them. Different kinds of awareness, also linked to the hospital ward in question, led to different interactions between the dying patients, their relatives, and the medical staff on duty. Probably because it was originally employed in the sociology of health and illness field, grounded theory is still particularly relevant in studying health-related issues from a sociological perspective, as well as in nursing research. However, scholars in other fields, as well, have recently explored the usefulness of such a research strategy. For instance, in organizational studies, grounded theory is one of the leading research strategies employed to understand the relationship between organizational identity, organizational constructs, and organizational processes, particularly how the former influence the interactions within organizations (Ravasi and Canato 2013). A growing literature on software engineering, moreover, investigates how software practitioners interact in the process of producing new software, providing insights to facilitate understanding and improve the social practices of software engineers within working settings that might be based on highly informal working routines (Hoda, Noble, and Marshall 2012).

Although qualitative methods have a long tradition in social movement studies (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002a; Diani and Eyerman 1992), grounded theory has thus far received scarce, if any, attention in the field. Early exceptions are Edwards (1997) and Lichterman (2002). The latter, however, is mainly interested in some aspects of coding in grounded theory and refers to grounded theory as “analytic techniques” rather than as an encompassing, and internally consistent, research strategy. Another, more recent, exception is the work of Coe, who employed grounded theory to study youth activism around sexual health in Ecuador and Peru (Coe, Goicolea, and Öhman 2013) and advocacy coalitions for reproductive rights in Peru (Coe 2009; Coe 2011; Coe 2012). Apart from these isolated examples, however, grounded theory still remains at the margins of social movement studies. This neglect could be linked to the fact that scholars have seldom investigated some of the aspects that fit best with a grounded theory research strategy—perceptions, identities, emotions and, more in general, cultural dimensions of protests—when it came to social movements (McAdam 1994). With its stress on systematic and comparative coding, however, grounded theory seems to have the potential to overcome the “methodological and measurement problems with regard to identity, emotions and culture” that “may frustrate the development of this cultural perspective into a new paradigm” (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002b, xii). Quite obviously, the fact that social movement scholars seldom mention grounded theory explicitly in their research is not just linked to the internal development of the field of study. On the contrary, this can also be due to the very practices of empirical research and the naming of methodological tools associated with it. Many methods of data gathering common in

grounded theory, indeed, have been used in research on social movements, although scholars have usually been interested in the combined use of specific methods—for example, frame analysis and life histories—rather than in developing consistent research strategies to investigate mobilizations. At the same time, when consistent research strategies were developed to focus on cultural processes in social movements, as in the case of anthropologists, some features of grounded theory were present—although they were named in a different way, without necessarily using the specialized vocabulary that is unique to grounded theory.

In short, this means that some key elements of grounded theory have already been employed in social movement studies, although mainly in a scattered and implicit way. This chapter, therefore, illustrates how grounded theory can work as a flexible source of guidelines in developing research on grassroots political participation and mobilization. It is indeed a preliminary attempt to show how grounded theory offers an opportunity to combine in a consistent research design different methods of data gathering that scholars are familiar with in social movement studies. Moreover, it aims at specifying some key elements of grounded theory, with a focus on the process of qualitative data coding that usually remains in the background in the written products of research on social movements. Starting from my research on media practices in contemporary social movements, in the remainder of the chapter I first briefly present some general traits of grounded theory, also sketching its historical development. I then discuss data collection and data analysis in grounded theory. Finally, I reflect on the meanings that theorizing might acquire in grounded theory when it comes to social movement studies. Conclusions summarize the main features of grounded theory in order to show in which cases this research strategy can be fruitfully employed to investigate social movements.

Sensitizing Concepts and Constructivist Grounded Theory

The development of grounded theory is embedded in the intellectual foundations of its two initiators, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. The latter, who studied with Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University, was acquainted with systematic quantitative methods (Bryman, Liao, and Lewis-Beck 2003). The former, linked to the Chicago School, was familiar with pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionism (Bryman, Liao, and Lewis-Beck 2003). The influence of quantitative methods is clear in the development of systematic coding techniques in grounded theory, while the impact of pragmatist

philosophy and symbolic interactionism led to the importance that meanings and interpretations of social actors have for grounded theorists. A relevant aspect of grounded theory, indeed, is that the analysis is not based on pre-constituted hypotheses about the field under investigation. On the contrary, it usually consists in one or more “sensitizing concepts” that guide the analysis, since “whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer 1954, 7). This means that more than testing hypotheses, when applying grounded theory researchers explore concepts that function as a starting point for the analysis, since they guide it; those concepts, in turn, are filled with meaning through the careful examination of empirical data.

For instance, in my research on media practices in social movements against precarity (Mattoni 2012), I was interested in understanding what activists did with different kinds of media during mobilizations. Having been involved in social movements myself, I knew that activists interacted with several media outlets, technologies, and professionals during their daily lives. But when I approached the topic at the academic level, I found that the literature was divided into different clusters that did not speak one with the other (Mattoni 2013). Some scholars were interested only in how the mainstream media portrayed, mostly in a misleading way, demonstrations and other forms of protests; others scholars focused only on how activists, amongst others, engaged in the creation of alternative media. Some scholars were interested only in how information and communication technologies, and especially the Internet, quickly became powerful tools in the hands of social movement actors; others focused on how activists interacted with more analogic media technologies like the press, radio, and television. This specialization in the social science literature on the topic served to cast light on specific media–movement dynamics. But in times of “media convergence” (Murray 2003; Jenkins 2006) and “media manifold” (Couldry 2012), these cleavages made less and less sense when considering mobilizations. Therefore, I decided that I wanted to reconstruct and analyze activist “media practices” (Couldry 2004) developed in the context of mobilizations. More specifically, I treated “activist media practices” as a sensitizing concept that provided the direction along which to carry on my analysis. At the same time, I intended to develop further the concept of “activist media practices,” starting from an empirical research in a rather unexplored area of investigation: mobilizations of precarious workers.

As it is clear from the example provided here, grounded theory implies specific interactions with both the world of empirical data in which sensitizing concepts are rooted, and the realm of theoretical reflections with which sensitizing concepts interact at some point in the research process. The overall question, indeed, is to what extent grounded theory practitioners should already be familiar with the empirical phenomena that they want

to investigate, on the one hand, and with relevant literature in the field of research in which they position themselves, on the other. There is not, of course, a single answer to this methodological quandary, which is unquestionably relevant also to other research strategies and methods. Knowing how grounded theory has developed over time, however, might suggest some keys to finding a balance between previous knowledge about the case under study, whether at the empirical or the theoretical level.

Introduced in the 1960s, grounded theory has developed across the years. Seminal works establishing grounded theory in the social sciences argued for the importance of neutral and objective knowledge as a feature and an outcome of grounded theory (cfr. Strauss and Corbin 1990). Due to its roots in pragmatist philosophy and symbolic interactionism, grounded theory has always had a kind of constructivist flavor (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2008). But early works were linked to positivistic positions with regard to the analytical process and were therefore classified as “objectivist grounded theory” (Charmaz 2000). It was in this early version of grounded theory that the use of previous theoretical knowledge about the empirical phenomenon under investigation was openly discouraged: having an overall knowledge about the object of study was considered a sufficient condition to begin the fieldwork, which did not have to be guided by any specific theoretical framework (Glaser and Strauss 1967). However, later work on grounded theory recognized the relevance of existing literature in the field (Dey 1999), as well as the importance of “theoretical sensitivity” for the analysis, obtained through diverse sources beyond the examination of data, including the personal experience of researchers and previous studies on the topic under investigation (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Moreover, in more recent years, another branch has emerged. Named “constructivist grounded theory,” it starts from the assumption that the researcher is situated in social reality and, as such, brings with her previous knowledge—both empirical, related to the fieldwork, and theoretical, related to concepts and models—when engaging with grounded theory (Charmaz 2008). The activity of self-reflection, however, might help to put under critical scrutiny previous theoretical knowledge and its role in the interpretation of data. At the same time, previous empirical knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation can be useful to enter the fieldwork, as is the case with other methods of data collection (see, for instance, Malthaner 2014, as well as Balsiger and Lambelet 2014), and to guide the researcher in focusing on significant sensitizing concepts. Although useful, previous empirical knowledge should also be put into perspective—it should not be considered as a necessary condition to engage on research about a specific topic, as researchers who are not acquainted with the field might also find relevant sensitizing concepts with which to work later in the research process. In other words, researchers who lack first-hand experience and knowledge with the empirical realities

they intend to investigate might decide to devote some time to becoming familiar with their research subjects before going more in-depth with the investigation.

Data Collection and Data Coding in Grounded Theory

As is also evident in this volume, in social movement studies scholars employ a broad array of qualitative methods to collect and analyze data when studying mobilizations. However, although many scholars implicitly, and more seldom explicitly, refer to some of the features that characterize grounded theory, there is no such thing as a systematic discussion on the use of grounded theory in social movement studies. In this section, I engage with this task and discuss two important steps that characterize grounded theory—data collection and data coding—linking them to the study of grassroots political participation and mobilization.

DATA COLLECTION

Grounded theory is a broad and flexible research strategy that allows different methods of data collection. This means that the practice of grounded theory can be combined with other common approaches in social movement studies, like the “case study” approach (Snow and Anderson 1991; Snow and Trom 2002) and other methods of data collection;¹ indeed, grounded theorists may include diverse materials from which abstractions might be generated, ranging from survey results to historical documents, so that the different dimensions of the topic under investigation might be grasped from multiple viewpoints (Evans 2013). Due to its focus on theory building, however, grounded theory requires the production of “rich data” (Charmaz 2006), through which scholars can grasp the diverse layers of denotation and connotation of sensitizing concepts. In short, grounded theory privileges the thick descriptions characterizing qualitative materials, rather than the synthetic information provided through quantitative datasets. In social movement studies, many methods of data collection impart thick descriptions of mobilizations and can therefore be fruitfully employed in the context of grounded theory: participant observation in social movement activities, including preparatory meetings, movement assemblies, and public protests; in-depth interviews with activists, including life histories, that might focus on different aspects related to mobilizations; focus groups in which the researcher guides the

discussion of small groups of activists about specific topics related to mobilizations; and, finally, written—but also increasingly audio and video—documents produced by social movements before, during, and after protest occurs.

While participant observation, in-depth interviews, and focus groups require an active role of researchers in creating the dataset, social movement documents are primary sources produced by activists without the intervention of the researcher. These four methods of data collection are different in many respects, but provide ample accounts of social movements starting from the point of view of activists and their social practices, an aspect that is consistent with putting the point of view of the subjects at the center of investigations inspired by grounded theory. Each valuable in itself, these four methods of data collection provide even more detailed descriptions when they are combined and triangulated, so as to look at the same empirical phenomenon—a wave of protest, a contentious performance, an activist group—from different perspectives (Denzin 1975). In her research about two coalitions advocating for reproductive rights in Peru, for instance, Coe gathered data through six weeks of participant observation, during which she “observed meetings and activities, held informal conversations, reviewed key documents, and accompanied coalition members to their engagements with government actors” (Coe 2012, 156). Moreover, she combined participant observation with focus group discussions and qualitative interviews for each of the two coalitions under investigation (Coe 2012, 156). Similarly, Edwards (1997) completed in-depth interviews with activists involved in the anti-nuclear power movement in the United States, with some participant observation and document collection.

An important aspect of data collection is sampling. Unlike in other research strategies, in grounded theory sampling acquires a peculiar meaning since it does not follow statistical reasons, for instance, by constructing a representative selection of the population under investigation. Rather, sampling develops in parallel with the analytical process, in which we can distinguish two moments: “initial sampling” and “theoretical sampling” (Charmaz 2006). The former is the point of departure of the investigation according to which the researcher decides whom she wants to interview following general criteria. The latter, instead, guides the researcher while the investigation unfolds.

In my research on how social movements engage in media practices, I wanted to know how activists used different kinds of media during protests against precarity. A good way to reach this objective was to collect information through in-depth interviews with activists. Hence, I began to contact activists who had participated in the organization of at least one of the mobilizations against precarity in which I was interested. The resulting sample was not a statistical representation of those who organized the mobilizations in points. Rather, following purposeful sampling (Patton 1990) based on snowball techniques (Weiss 1994; Blaikie 2000), I broadened the sample to include

activists who were active in various social movement groups. At the same time, I began to transcribe and analyze some of the interviews.

Soon, I realized that a peculiar category of media outlets seemed particularly interesting: radical left-wing media. Neither purely mainstream nor strictly alternative, radical left-wing media deserved to be further explored because it seemed that activists assigned to them specific meaning and interacted with them in specific ways. In particular, it was already clear from the first interviews that the relationship between activists and journalists working in radical left-wing media was quite controversial, although frequently passionate. For these reasons, I decided to interview radical left-wing journalists who covered the mobilizations organized by the activists I was interviewing. Although I began my research already aware of the existence of radical left-wing media, it was only after the early steps in data gathering and analysis that I fully realized that they could be considered another important “sensitizing concept” in my research. This realization, in turn, made me enlarge the interviewee sample to include journalists. In this case, the selection of subjects to be interviewed was guided by theoretical reasons. The sampling, in short, was a “theoretical sampling.” Similarly, in her research on coalitions advocating for reproductive rights in Peru, Coe performed an early ongoing analysis of the notes taken during her participant observation to single out “relevant ideas which in turn helped guide my sampling of subsequent observations” (Coe 2009, 432).

This example shows that grounded theory is based on an “abductive” (Blaikie 2000) research process that keeps a strong mutual connection among the three key moments—data gathering, data analysis, and concept building—without denying the role of previous theoretical knowledge on the topics under investigation. Although seminal work on grounded theory explicitly referred to a logic of induction guiding this research strategy, more recent scholarly work clearly indicates that grounded theory rests on abductive thinking, according to which “the interpretation of the data is not finalized at an early stage but that new codes, categories and theories can be developed and redeveloped if necessary” (Reichertz 2010, 224), so that it is possible to generate “creative and novel theoretical insights through a dialectic of cultivated theoretical sensitivity and methodological heuristics” (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 180). As in other qualitative research strategies, data gathering, data analysis, and concept building do not follow one another in a linear way. In fact, they interact simultaneously during the research process, so that the practice of fieldwork is not separated from the theorizing of analysis. Moreover, the theorizing stage might have an effect on the practice of fieldwork. This circular research process is particularly important in grounded theory, in which it is usually more evident and explicit than in other qualitative research strategies.

Another important issue, when gathering data and constructing samples, is to know when to stop doing this and to begin to analyze the collected materials. This issue also arises in grounded theory, but from a different

perspective. Indeed, the decision to stop gathering data is intimately related with the ongoing analysis that usually starts well before the researcher decides that her sample of data is satisfactory. This is because grounded theory rests on a continuous going back and forth between moments devoted to data gathering and moments devoted to data analysis. Researchers are supposed to begin their data analysis early in their investigation so that they can refine the way in which they observe the data while they continue to collect them. In doing this, researchers can change the strategy of data gathering during the fieldwork. Sampling, in this case, becomes a reflective process whose outcome cannot be fully predetermined when the data gathering starts. And since the main outcome of grounded theory is to develop different levels of abstractions from the data, the researchers decide when to stop collecting data, and hence when they consider their final sample to be satisfactory, depending on when they are able to show that they have achieved some level of “theoretical saturation” (Glaser and Strauss 1967) or “theoretical sufficiency” (Dey 1999)—that is, when the conceptual categories elaborated during the research are sufficient to gather and analyze more data without the need to modify them any further. In my own research on activist media practices, I gathered and analyzed 34 in-depth interviews with activists involved in precarious workers’ mobilizations and five in-depth interviews with radical left-wing journalists. I stopped because, when analyzing the last interviews, I noticed that I was not adding anything new to the conceptualization of activist media practices. In addition, I was faced with more pragmatic time constraints due to the PhD program in the context of which I was developing my research. When conducting empirical research, other aspects should be also taken into consideration during fieldwork, broadly related to the academic context in which the investigation is embedded. It is indeed important to acknowledge the time frame of the research project, also in terms of deadlines for submission of reports, papers, and/or dissertations presenting the empirical results. At the same time, it is also crucial to recognize the conventions that are at work within a specific field and related to a specific method of data gathering and analysis. Most studies interested in organizational identities, and situated within the management field, employ between 25 and 35 in-depth interviews (Ravasi and Canato 2013). However, the number of interviews necessary to attain saturation also depends on the topic under investigation (Riley 1996). For instance, social movement researchers who employed grounded theory collected between 16 and 60 in-depth interviews (Edwards 1997; Coe 2009; Mattoni 2012; Coe 2013): although sometimes in-depth interviews are the only materials gathered for the analysis (Coe 2013), frequently scholars who collect relatively low numbers of in-depth interviews tend to complement them with other qualitative data such as participant observation (Edwards 1997; Coe 2009), focus groups (Coe 2009), social movement documents (Edwards 1997; Mattoni 2012), and media contents and texts (Mattoni 2012).

ANALYZING DATA

Elaborating codes is a core analytical practice in grounded theory. Once the first data are collected and rendered in a format available for their analysis, for instance through the transcriptions of in-depth interviews or focus groups conversations, researchers begin to engage with the empirical materials in order to analyze them. The first step is assigning codes to portions of the data, which can be seen as an intermediate but important step in the research: the ring that keeps together the data collection and the data interpretation in the inquiry chain. Grounded theory provides “flexible guidelines” (Charmaz 2006), rather than strict rules, about how to conduct research. But especially when it comes to data analysis, some aspects need to be present in order to reflect the original spirit of grounded theory. Coding, indeed, usually revolves around a constant comparative analysis that rests on at least three interrelated, and at times overlapping, stages: a preliminary “open coding,” a more elaborated “axial coding,” and a focused “selective coding” (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The aim of open coding is, as the very name suggests, to “open up the inquiry” (Strauss 1987, 29), scrutinizing the data—like transcripts of in-depth interviews or reports of participant observations—to assign labels, or better codes, to portions of the documents under investigation. Open coding, also called “initial coding” (Charmaz 2006), allows the researcher to explore the data while keeping a rather open mind, receptive to all the clues and hints that the data might provide. Although some general ideas about the field might guide open coding, sometimes explicitly and often implicitly, at this stage researchers should let the codes emerge from the data without particular restrictions due to the presence, for instance, of already existing lists of codes.

In general, open coding is intimately linked to the texts under investigation, since researchers frequently code line-by-line, if not word-by-word. It is, in other words, grounded into the empirical data. As a result, the data are broken into smaller units: tentative codes that will be further re(de)finéd through subsequent coding stages. Table 2.1, for instance, shows a portion of an in-depth interview transcript with an activist who is speaking about a radical left-wing newspaper with regard to mobilizations against precarity in Italy. Near the text, a column presents the outcomes of an open coding session. I used the general code “direct relationship” to highlight passages of the in-depth interview that were potentially interesting in light of my research question. While this kind of code can be useful to categorize specific portions of texts, a second round of open coding can help researchers to go even more in-depth, specifying further the quality of the general label with which they began. For instance, Table 2.1 shows that I broke into two sub-codes: the initial code “direct relationship”: “direct relationship–reason” when the interviewee evokes the reason why a direct relationship

Table 2.1 Open Coding in Grounded Theory

Text	Open coding
Obviously, with newspapers like <i>il Manifesto</i> or <i>Liberazione</i> , since they are friendly press, so to speak, there was a more intimate, more direct, more harmonious relationship . . . so we could also tell them: we should have more space [in the newspaper] at this point, you should say this because it would help [us], and we found a certain degree of attention with regard to the success of our mobilizations and to the messages that we wanted to deliver.	<i>Friendly press</i> <i>Direct relationship</i> <i>Direct relationship—reason—similar viewpoints</i> <i>Direct relationship—general attitude</i> <i>Direct relationship—outcome—media coverage—more space</i> <i>Direct relationship—outcome—media coverage—own message</i>

exists between his activist group and the newspapers he is discussing; and “outcome” when the interviewee explains the consequences that the direct relationship has on the activist group’s media coverage. The example provided in Table 2.1, moreover, shows that I also used an expression employed by the interviewees as a code in itself. This coding strategy is not rare in grounded theory: termed “in vivo coding” (Charmaz 2006), it allows the researcher to employ the expressions, or even single words and terms, of interviewees when they sound particularly meaningful and/or evocative to her. In vivo coding, indeed, produces codes that provide “analytic usefulness and imagery” (Strauss 1987, 33).

Overall, one of the outcomes of open coding is the emergence of a number of codes attached to the texts under investigation. When researchers advance in this stage, however, relationships between some of the codes will become more evident. The exploration of relationships amongst codes is at the center of “axial coding,” a relevant stage that partially overlaps with and then follows open coding (Strauss 1987). During the stage of axial coding, the researcher recomposes the fragments of data obtained through open coding, and the focus of the analysis shifts from the specific portions of data to the broader relationships between the codes that emerged during open coding. It is in this very moment that specific conceptual categories begin to emerge due to the recombination of codes disseminated in the documents, allowing the researcher to reconstruct four theoretical categories to which more specific codes belong: “conditions, interactions, strategies/tactics and consequences” (Strauss and Corbin 1990). These theoretical categories might function as a general frame of reference when performing axial coding, although not all researchers engaging with grounded theory decide to use this specific analytical frame to develop their analysis (Charmaz 2006). Rather, they explore the linkages among different codes developed around the same category. In other words, they focus their analysis, and coding, along the “axis” of specific categories (Strauss 1987, 32) that are relevant to and consistent with the topic under investigation.

After the open coding of some in-depth interview transcripts, for instance, it was clear that radical left-wing media implied specific interactions between actors, that is to say journalists and activists, who developed specific strategies and tactics to cope with radical left-wing media. I therefore focused on the relationship between the different codes associated with radical left-wing media that emerged during open coding. As already explained, when I began my research I was aware that radical left-wing media were different from mainstream and alternative media. The general knowledge of these media outlets provided an “holistic frame of reference” (Dey 1999, 103) for the systematic analysis I then performed on the data during open coding sessions. But it was only during axial coding that “radical left-wing media” emerged as a relevant sensitizing concept having a peculiar role for activists, who had even developed some counter-intuitive strategies in their respect. It is indeed easy to assume that radical left-wing media would be supportive when it comes to protests organized by radical left-wing social movements, as in the case of the mobilizations against precarity I investigated. Due to axial coding, though, I was able to provide a more subtle understanding of radical left-wing media during these protests.

In the interview extract provided in Table 2.1, it is clear that the activist in question has a rather negative perception of the daily newspaper *il manifesto*. Combining this with other codes emerging in other parts of the interview, I was able to explain that the social movement group to which the activist belonged acted in opposition to confederal trade unions, while the *il manifesto* journalist covering their protest was sympathetic with them—to the point of supporting their point of view on the protests. Beyond this, axial coding showed that activists had a clear perception of the political alliances of the radical left-wing media outlet in question, blamed for favoring traditional trade unions while ignoring the struggles of the social movement group; as a consequence, activists considered the radical left-wing media as a political actor, rather than simply a neutral media channel.

As the research advances in axial coding, the discovery of relationships between different codes brings forward certain categories and pushes back others. In other words, some of the codes appear as more important to the researcher, in terms of their frequency and centrality, than others. While analyzing her data on coalitions mobilizing for reproductive rights in Peru, for instance, Coe grouped the 250 codes obtained during the open coding stage into 13 categories that seemed to be more relevant than others and hence deserved further investigation (Coe 2009, 433). It is in this moment that another stage, named “selective coding,” begins in the analytical process (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987). During the stage of selective coding, researchers focus only on a selected “core category” (Strauss and Corbin 1990) that might function as the pivot of theorization and abstraction in the research. The original approach to selective coding, however, proved to have

some limitations: in some studies, for instance, researchers might elaborate on more than just one core category (Dey 1999). Moreover, because of the requirements for creating a core category, there is a risk of making it very similar to an independent variable (Dey 1999)—which might not be consistent with those analyses that do not aim at developing causal explanations for empirical phenomena. For this reason, it is also possible to speak about “focused coding” (Charmaz 2006), according to which the researcher chooses to pay attention to those codes that “make the most analytic sense to categorize [her] data incisively and completely” (Charmaz 2006, 58). Consistent with constructivist grounded theory, focused coding imparts codes that are more abstract than those obtained through open coding, in that they usually refer to categories—and often to relationships between categories—that recur quite systematically in the data set and evoke more general themes around which the analysis develops (Charmaz 2002).

In my research about media practices during mobilizations against precarity in Italy, I elaborated the abstract category “media knowledge practices” to refer to an important aspect of activist media practices. I did not have this category when I began my research, since I was mostly interested in looking at how activists interacted with media technologies and media professionals. During open coding I began to notice that activists frequently judged specific media outlets in a positive or negative way. When it came to radical left-wing media, for instance, several activists considered *il manifesto* or *Liberazione* as either allies or opponents of social movements. All belonging to radical left-wing social movement groups, the activists I interviewed showed different understandings of these specific media outlets. A partial explanation, emerging during axial coding related to the category “radical left-wing media,” was that activists conceived these specific media outlets as political actors, rather than neutral media channels. For this reason, as one of the examples provided above highlights, certain social movement groups had better relationships than others did with radical left-wing media, sometimes depending on the type of protest event at stake. But this explanation was not entirely satisfactory: in some cases, activists belonging to the same social movement group and engaging in the same protest events imparted different perceptions of radical left-wing media.

To understand this aspect, during axial coding I decided to develop additional codes related to “perceptions of media.” As I advanced in the coding process, it became clear that activists developed specific knowledge about the media environment in which they acted, resting not only on their actual interactions with media, but also on a certain level of common sense surrounding media technologies and professionals. Therefore, during focused coding I paid specific attention to a more general and abstract category, “media knowledge practices.” With focused coding, indeed, the researcher considers how a significant category unfolds along the entire data set. In the

case of my research, moreover, I not only coded media knowledge practices across different in-depth interviews, but also across different kinds of protests against precarity the interviewees talked about, developing a “within case” and “cross-case theme analysis” (Creswell 2007, 75) to provide more grounded sensitizing concepts and hypotheses related to media knowledge practices and, more in general, activist media practices.

In short, the data analysis in grounded theory develops in three distinct stages. The first interaction between the researcher and her empirical data consists in sessions of open coding that break down the texts into small segments. When open coding enters a more advanced stage, the researcher recombines the data segments into broader groupings around the same analytical category. This stage is called “axial coding.” Finally, the researcher moves towards yet another level of abstraction and, with selective or focused coding, elaborates more general categories that acquire a significant and relevant role in the analysis. In other words, grounded theory includes two cycles of coding organized around three coding methods: open coding (a first-cycle coding method), and then axial and focused coding (which are both second-cycle coding methods) (Saldana 2012).

Engaging with three coding stages, grounded theory involves time-consuming analysis sessions that can be supported through the use of specific software, designed for Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) (Di Gregorio and Davidson 2008). Amongst commercial software, Atlas.ti was originally developed with the specificities of grounded theory in mind; some observers say that this research strategy became even more popular due to its use (Timmermans and Tavory 2010). The language used to describe analytical procedures in grounded theory, indeed, has been translated into functions and commands in the software. However, other commercial software like NVivo and MaxQDA can also be useful in supporting coding development and memo writing. The relevance of CAQDAS for grounded theory is particularly clear when it comes to more advanced stages of coding, like axial and selective coding, since the software enables the researcher to navigate easily across different documents, quickly retrieving specific codes and the portions of texts associated with them. For the same reason, the use of software is also useful when it comes to including empirical data in the final reports, articles, and books that represent the outcomes of the research.

Generating Abstractions in Grounded Theory

Following the three coding stages mentioned earlier, the researcher can reach a certain level of conceptual theorization without losing her contact with the original empirical data. But this is not the only way in which the researcher

can keep contact with and analyze the data. First, since grounded theory implies a circular research process, axial coding in particular is often a stage in which the researcher decides to go back into the fieldwork to collect other data useful to enriching the analytical categories that emerge during the data analysis—or to gather materials able to answer unexpected research questions that emerged during axial, or even focused, coding. Second, and more importantly, the three coding stages are always supported by another relevant research activity in grounded theory: memo writing, which usually accompanies the coding of empirical materials from the very first stages of data analysis. Already present during open coding, and even more essential and intense during axial and focused coding, memo writing allows the researcher to “conceptualize the data in narrative form” (Lempert 2010, 245). In this sense, memos constitute the space for theoretical reflections on the data that researchers are analyzing: “the memo hints at how sensitizing concepts, long left silent, may murmur during coding and analysis” (Charmaz 2006, 76). In the form of either rough sketches and questions or more systematic comparisons between categories, memos support the unfolding of theorization. At the same time, memos also render the research process transparent and traceable, since they can be seen as the researcher’s analytical narrations with herself during the analytical process (Lempert 2010, 247). Also for this reason, with some reorganization, memos can be useful during the public presentation of early research findings and can sometimes become part of published manuscripts (Charmaz 2006).

In short, together with coding activities, the systematic writing of memos is a significant process that sustains the passage from rough empirical data to the elaboration of codes based on those data—and therefore categories referring to the empirical data. More importantly, perhaps, memos assist researchers in moving towards the elaboration of substantive and formal theories. In grounded theory, substantive theories are usually generated about a specific empirical area of investigation, while formal theories usually refer to more conceptual areas of sociological inquiry (Glaser 1978, 144). The two are linked, to the extent that the formal theory “increases [the substantive theory] in breadth and depth of explanation” (Glaser 2010, 100). In grounded theory literature, the actual distinction between substantive and formal theory is still under debate, also due to some initial confusion in the formulation of the two concepts (Glaser 2010). Without entering into this complex debate, I point out that the very idea of substantive and formal theories might serve as a useful guideline in the work of abstraction that starts with coding and ends with the presentation of findings. Although I did not explicitly refer to these expressions, in my research I also engaged in a work of conceptual abstraction that followed two stages. Reflecting upon these two stages might provide some insights about theorizing in the spirit of grounded theory when dealing with social movements.

When thinking about social movements, substantive theories might refer to the emergence of specific and contextual social processes in mobilizations—for instance, theorizing about the ways in which activists involved in precarious workers' protests interacted with the media at large, as was the case in my research. Frequently, substantive theory is based on the comparison of different instances of similar social groups related to the same substantive area of inquiry. In my research, the focus was on different activist groups that interacted with the media during five protest events, all related to struggles of precarious workers, but different in many respects. This allowed me to gather significant observations on a diverse range of protests within the same area of contention and, then, to perform a within-case and cross-case axial coding on which I based a preliminary attempt at substantive theorization about how activists interact with the media in mobilizations of precarious workers.

First, I focused on the perceptions and knowledge that activists developed earlier the media environment in which they were inserted: the emergence of a concept like the “radical left-wing media” discussed earlier was linked to the activists' peculiar cartography about Italian media outlets, organizations, and channels. At a more general level, I grouped activists' social practices oriented towards the media under a broader category, which I named “knowledge media practices” in order to underline the importance of perceiving processes and learning outcomes related to the media environment. Second, I looked at the interactions that occurred between activists and media professionals, media technologies, and even media texts like newspaper articles and television shows. In this case, I spoke about “relational media practices” in order to include under the same category a range of different interactions with media that were nonetheless linked to one another. Shifting from narrow codes attached to portions of text to more general and abstract categories linked to social practices allowed me to speak about two processes that were at work in Italian precarious workers' mobilizations with regard to the media. Although probably in an unorthodox way, the elaboration of these two categories of social practices can be considered an attempt in the direction of substantive theorizing according to the spirit of grounded theory.

Obviously, “knowledge media practices” and “relational media practices” were connected in a more general social process according to which activists continuously remixed and reshaped their perceptions about what was going on in actual interactions with different kinds of media outlets and technologies. At this point, I entered a different stage of reflection, engaging with a second order of abstraction according to which I attempted to define two pivotal concepts in understanding social movements from a media perspective—“activist media practices” and “repertoire of communication”—that can also be employed as analytical lenses beyond the study of Italian mobilizations against precarity. Although not formal theorizing in the strict sense, it is clear that this passage brought the research to a different level of conceptualization,

also explicitly engaging with existing literature related to social practices and media practices, on the one hand, and with existing literature on repertoire of communication, on the other. Although grounded theory puts aside existing theories and models in the early stages of the empirical research, conversations with other authors are essential, especially when speculating on processes and mechanisms from a more theoretical perspective. And this is because, quite simply, researchers do not work in a void and are, in fact, embedded in a dense network of theories, concepts, and models elaborated in past and present times. While already existing intellectual production on a specific topic can be temporarily forgotten when beginning grounded theory research, especially in the formulation of more abstract concepts and reflections, the researcher might find it beneficial to engage with existing literature in the field—also to find her own voice while inserting and positioning her work in the constantly developing realm of academic literature. In the last stage of her research on advocacy coalitions mobilizing for reproductive rights, for instance, Coe engaged with already existing theories on how feminist social movement organizations intervened in policy processes in Latin American, showing how her findings confirmed but also expanded some of the scholarly works in the field (Coe 2009, 440–2).

When to Use Grounded Theory? Some Concluding Remarks

Scholars in social movement studies have explored various methods of data collection and data analysis, both quantitative and qualitative. In some cases, they have borrowed methods commonly used in the social sciences at large, such as participant observation and in-depth interview. In other cases, they have developed ad hoc methods in order to address specific needs linked to the area of research, as in the case of protest event analysis. In yet other cases, finally, they have adapted specific research methods to the field of social movements, as with frame analysis. The variety of methods reflects the variety of research questions and interests that have been linked to social movements. Less frequently, though, social movement scholars have explicitly reflected on the overall research strategies—rather than the methods of data collection and data analysis—employed during their research. This chapter proposed a first step in this direction, introducing grounded theory starting from actual examples linked to my research on activist media practices in mobilizations against precarity.

In particular, I introduced and discussed several features of grounded theory that can serve as a source of inspiration for scholars working on grassroots political participation and mobilization from a qualitative

perspective. However, as with other research strategies and methodological tools, grounded theory seems more suitable to inquiry into certain aspects of social movements and not others—and to answer certain questions about social movements and not others. Depending on the research puzzle and research question, some methods of data gathering and analysis might be more appropriate than others. This is true also in the case of grounded theory. Overall, due to its focus on the emergence of theories and concepts through careful data examination, this research strategy seems particularly suitable when addressing new phenomena and/or understudied areas in social movements for which it might be difficult to formulate and test hypotheses. In this respect, research puzzles formulated around “what” (is going on here) and “how” (things are developing here) research questions might be successfully addressed with grounded theory. Thinking about social movements as an empirical area of investigation, for instance, grounded theory might be useful for research questions that tackle what is going on in a particular field of contention—in terms of the political actors involved, but also with regard to their interactions, and ultimately the dynamic social processes and mechanisms that characterize the field of contention. Going more in-depth in the reconstruction and understanding of mobilizations, grounded theory might also be a relevant research strategy for those researchers interested in looking at how specific processes and mechanisms unfold in social movements.

Because of its views on the research process, grounded theory seems less apt to address questions that explicitly tackle the “why” (this is happening) of social phenomena, which often imply causal explanations resting on the interplay of dependent, intervening, and independent variables. These elements, indeed, are almost absent in the technical vocabulary of grounded theory, whose aim is not to explain causal correlations between empirical evidences. Rather, due to the importance that grounded theory assigns to the perceptions, meanings, and emotions of the subjects under study, this research strategy seems particularly suitable for investigations about cultural processes in social movements, in which the researcher focuses on the meanings and interpretations linked to contentious collective actions. That said, “what” and “how” research questions frequently also provide partial answers that also tackle the reasons why some social phenomena develop in a certain way within a specific context. Therefore, answering such questions through grounded theory might also lead to the development of in-depth knowledge about specific causal mechanisms that are usually linked to “why” research questions as well, providing tentative explanations and hypotheses about the causes that are behind such processes and mechanisms.

Overall, moreover, constructivist grounded theory in particular might also foster the elaboration of more transparent research processes: something that might be useful, especially when addressing ethical concerns or explaining specific methodological choices. Indeed, researchers might use methods of

data collection—or construction—that require deep connections with the world of activism in order to develop solid knowledge on cultural processes related to social movements. This is the case with participant observation of the daily activities of social movement actors, an invaluable method when it comes to exploring complex cultural processes in mobilizations (Benford 1987; Lichterman 1998; Lichterman 2002; Blee 2012) that can certainly be used also in the framework of a grounded theory research strategy. Probably more than other methods of data collection, however, participant observation implies several ethical concerns for researchers, due to “(structural and identity-related) issues that influence [the researcher’s] positions in participant observation and their implications for access, subjectivity and political bias” (McCurdy and Uldam 2014). Although self-reflection can certainly be obtained using other techniques, constructivist grounded theory explicitly points out the value of self-reflection: it is a research strategy of “explication and emergence” (Charmaz 2008, 408), according to which abstractions do not simply emerge from the data. In fact, they are the outcome of an intense analytical process in which researchers interpret the views and voices of social actors under investigation (Charmaz 2000; 2008), coupling them with constant self-reflections on the very research process (Charmaz 2006).

■ NOTE

1. I employ here the common expression “data collection” or, in the text, “data gathering.” However, according to constructivist grounded theory, the researcher has an active role in “constructing” the data, rather than simply gathering them. For this reason, we can also speak of “data construction” when a researcher wants to point out the constructed nature of data gathering.

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3 Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

What It Is, What It Does, and How It Works

Claudius Wagemann

Introduction: QCA as a Social Science Method

There are (at least) two ways to understand “methods” in the social sciences: on the one hand, this refers to how to conduct interviews, how to analyze texts, or how to calculate a statistical correlation. In this perspective, methods are understood as *techniques*. On the other hand, in methodology (as the *logos*, that is, the science of methods and how to work with them), the term “method” is always more often used in expressions such as “the case study method” (see George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007; Blatter and Haverland 2012; Rohlfing 2012), or for the description of procedures such as “process tracing” (George and Bennett 2005, 205ff.). In this use, “method” is not so much understood as a technique, since these “methods” can be based on several techniques, but as a general description of a specific *research design*.

This important difference in the understanding of methods, which is also a *rationale* for this book, is too often only a vague and not explicitly visible difference. This problem becomes especially valid in the case of *Qualitative Comparative Analysis* (QCA), with which this chapter deals. While QCA certainly makes use of certain techniques (as explained later), it should be better understood as a “research approach,” since it is more of a design than a technique (on this, see also Wagemann and Schneider 2010, 378f.). There are plenty of opportunities to connect a QCA analysis with various data collection techniques. It can be easily imagined to combine fieldwork, participant observation, archival research, in-depth or semi-structured interviews, survey analysis, protest event analysis, discourse analysis, and even network analysis (see various chapters in *this volume*) with QCA.¹

This present chapter starts from a definition and a historical overview on QCA methods, proceeds with a more general epistemological discussion on the specific view on causality in QCA, and then presents a very introductory description of the practical execution of a QCA.²

What Is QCA?

Qualitative Comparative Analysis is, first of all, a particular name for a research design. From the very wording, we can deduce that it is qualitative, comparative, and analytical. However, none of these three terms is without problems.

Perhaps the least problematic term is “comparative,” since we could simply assume that QCA works with more than one single case. But this leaves us with the question: if more than one case, then how many cases should be compared? The word “comparative” itself does not give us an answer: in theory, an infinite number of cases could be compared. Nevertheless, in social science practice, above all since Lijphart’s (1971) seminal article, a small (two, four, six), and less often a mid-sized (between ten and thirty, very rarely also more) number of cases is understood as typical for a comparative design. In QCA, this has to be put a slightly differently: QCA has a (rather technical) problem with very low numbers of cases, since it is an approach based on *diversity*.

Readers are probably familiar with Przeworski and Teune’s (1970) most different and most similar systems designs (MDSD and MSSD). With the MDSD, it is possible to explain similarities in the outcome for otherwise different cases. With the MSSD, by contrast, differences in the outcome are explained for generally similar cases.³ No matter on which of these classical designs we rely, we will find diversity: either with regard to the constitution of the cases (MDSD) or with regard to the outcome (MSSD). QCA adds to this: in order for it to function well, it is advisable to ensure some variation in the outcome *and*, at the same time, to base the analysis on different cases. The difference among the cases follows Lazarsfeld’s (1937) ideas of a property space: every case is decomposed into its constituting properties and is understood as a specific configuration of these properties. For example, social movements could be described in terms of their number of activists, their date of origin, and their mode of protest. Any single social movement can then be defined in terms of these three properties, for example as a movement with many activists that is old and that uses demonstrations as a main form of protest. The case as such disappears and is grouped with other cases that belong to the same configuration. “Case” in this sense does not necessarily refer to organizations: individuals can also be described in terms of their characteristics.⁴ For a comparison of these configurations to make sense, a high level of diversity among the cases is needed. Also, in order to avoid a no-variance design, the outcome also has to show a certain level of diversity. In brief: QCA is based on diversity with regard to *both* the outcome and a plenitude of different case configurations.⁵

Since diversity is such an important feature of QCA, which renders it even more diversity-based than the MDSD and the MSSD, we can see that QCA’s application is suboptimal for a very small number of cases.⁶ Therefore, the

notion of “comparable” in QCA is better characterized by saying that QCA as a comparative method is more suited for a mid-sized number of cases than for a small number of cases.⁷

While the term “comparative” within the expression “Qualitative Comparative Analysis” has not been too complicated and has mainly revised the understanding of the number of cases to be included in a comparison, the word “analysis” might pose a certain challenge. Most importantly, QCA can be differentiated from other analytical approaches through its being rooted in set theory. Set theory is usually taught at high schools in only superficial ways; its notation system and its operations are very similar, if not equal (for a comparison, see Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 54) to Boolean algebra and the logic of propositions. While there is the risk that such a formal and, indeed, mathematical approach alienates some potential applicants from QCA, thinking in set relations is rather typical for the social sciences. This can be most clearly seen in the use of “if . . . then . . .” hypotheses, which imply the use of set theory.

Let us illustrate the equivalence of set theory and “if . . . then . . .” reasoning with a simple example: instead of saying “if a social movement uses Web 2.0 tools, then it can react to new challenges within 24 hours,” we could also say that “social movements using Web 2.0 tools” constitute a subset of “social movements ready to react to new challenges within 24 hours.” This reasoning divides⁸ all “social movements ready to react to new challenges within 24 hours” into two mutually exclusive subsets: those of “social movements using Web 2.0 tools” and those of “social movements not using Web 2.0 tools.” If the former set is completely contained in the target set (“social movements ready to react to new challenges within 24 hours”), and if there is no single social movement using Web 2.0 tools *without* being a member of the target set, then social movements using Web 2.0 tools constitutes a true subset of the target set. If this subset relation exists, then we can find three possible situations: social movements that use Web 2.0 tools AND are ready to react to new challenges; social movements that do not use Web 2.0 tools AND are nevertheless ready to react to new challenges; and social movements that do not use Web 2.0 tools AND are not ready to react to new challenges. Only the combination of social movements that use Web 2.0 tools AND are not ready to react to new challenges cannot exist, because otherwise Web 2.0 movements would not be a true subset of the reactive movements. However, if this combination does not exist, then we can confirm the “if . . . then . . .” hypothesis.

And here is the difference from conventional—that is, co-variational—hypotheses as they are broadly diffused in statistics: from a QCA logic, it is indeed allowed that there are social movements which do *not* use Web 2.0 tools, but are reactive: the “if . . . then . . .” hypothesis just tells us something in case something happens, but leaves open what is the effect if that something does not happen. In our case, the hypothesis “if a social movement uses

Web 2.0 tools, then it can react to new challenges within 24 hours” does not propose any argument about the effect of the *non*-use of Web 2.0 tools. The hypothesis is not falsified if those social movements which do not use Web 2.0 tools are also reactive, since the hypothesis is somewhat “zoomed” on the “if” of a social movement using Web 2.0 tools. And this is fundamentally different from statistical reasoning: a parallel hypothesis in statistics could claim, for example, that “the more a social movement is based on Web 2.0 tools, the more reactive it will be.”⁹ Such a hypothesis would also implicitly claim that a social movement not based on Web 2.0 tools will also be non-reactive. To be clear: such a movement does not really confirm the set-theoretic hypothesis, either, but neither does it disconfirm it. It could be called an “irrelevant case” (Mahoney and Goertz 2004) whose usefulness for analysis is contested (Seawright 2002).

We have seen that set-theoretic analysis allows for the test of “if . . . then . . .” hypotheses. These hypotheses are closely linked to yet another terminology, namely that of sufficient and necessary conditions. Our example, “if a social movement uses Web 2.0 tools, then it can react to new challenges within 24 hours” means nothing else than that the use of Web 2.0 tools is a sufficient condition for a quick reaction. Or, in more abstract words: a sufficient condition is always a true subset of the outcome (see Figure 3.1, where the sufficient condition x is a subset of the outcome y).

Similarly, a necessary condition is always a true superset of the outcome (see Figure 3.2, where the necessary condition x is the superset of the outcome y).

If we claim that it is necessary to be inscribed in a movement (necessary condition) in order to receive its e-mail newsletter (outcome), then this means that the set of all inscribed members is a true superset¹⁰ of the set of all recipients of the newsletter: everybody who received the newsletter is also inscribed in the movement, but not everybody who is inscribed also gets the newsletter. As has been shown, hypotheses involving reasoning on sufficient conditions (Ragin 2000) or on necessary conditions (Goertz 2003) are much more frequent in the social sciences than we might think. In order to deal with them effectively, set-theoretic approaches (and thus QCA) should be used for their analysis rather than statistical, co-variational modes.

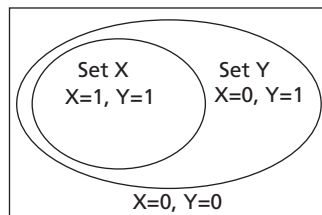


Figure 3.1 Sufficiency—Venn Diagram

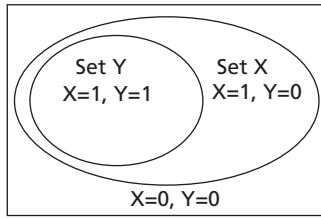


Figure 3.2 Necessity—Venn Diagram

However, but not only with regard to the researchers' (potential) interest in working out sufficient and/or necessary conditions, comparisons between statistical and QCA techniques fall short. QCA deals with a specific form of hypotheses (namely, "if. . . then. . ." hypotheses, and not correlational hypotheses as statistics); tries to find out set relations (and not correlations); "zooms" its hypotheses onto certain phenomena; and also produces a certain specific form of causality which follows an opposite logic to the understanding of causality in statistics (see below, point 3). Therefore, discussing whether "QCA is [. . .] an improvement over regression analysis" (Seawright 2005, 24) is not the most important question; rather, QCA makes its own contribution to social research, being an important tool for those situations which are based on set-theoretic reasoning. As such, it is not just a "different statistics," but a case-study-oriented way to deal with presumed set relations.

One more point has to be added to this: in their seminal methodological contribution, King et al. (1994, 34) distinguished very clearly between descriptive and causal forms of inference, so that it makes sense to also interpret QCA's "analytical" moment to be referring to both description and causality. Strictly speaking (and this is also the generally accepted textbook definition), QCA "aims at a causal interpretation" (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 8). However, this does not mean that set theory-based techniques cannot be very fruitfully applied for other purposes, such as, for example, the construction of typologies (Kvist 2006; 2007; see also Elman 2005) or for concept formation (Goertz 2006a, 27ff.). Indeed, typologies can be interpreted as intersections of sets;¹¹ and qualitative concept formation strategies can even be defined through basing concepts on their constituent characteristics, which can then be perceived as sets (see Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 127ff. for a more elaborate treatment on typically "qualitative" ways of concept formation). In other words, the applicability of set theory goes beyond the mainly causal interpretation of QCA. Therefore, although QCA is defined as a causal design that differentiates an *explanans* and an *explanandum*, selected tools can also be used for other purposes.

After clarifying the terms "comparative" and "analysis," "qualitative" is left. This, of course, confronts us with the biggest problem. There is a whole

literature that works on the definition of the term “qualitative methodology” (for interesting introductions, see Tarrow 2004; della Porta 2008; Goertz and Mahoney 2012;¹²). Without wanting to embark on this discussion, we see a strange pattern: while Ragin’s most influential publication on the use of Boolean algebra and set theory in the comparative social sciences—which eventually became “QCA”—wanted to move beyond the distinction of qualitative and quantitative methods (Ragin 1987), in the sense of a “third way,” the letter Q in the acronym QCA nowadays exclusively stands for “qualitative.”¹³ Ragin himself seems to prefer the adjective “case-oriented” (Ragin 2000, 23; for more on Ragin’s idea of what “case-oriented” research is, see Ragin 2004), although we can also find quotes in which he explicitly attributes QCA to the qualitative tradition (Ragin 2000, 13). There are certainly reasons why some would *not* want to qualify QCA as a purely qualitative method, because it is mainly based on a standardized algorithm; it works with mathematical operations, deriving from set theory; and it produces highly formalized solution formulae that resemble much of what is known from standard statistical techniques.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it cannot be negated that QCA has much in common with what is usually known as and called “qualitative research” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 10f., 122). Such a classification can be justified in the following way: QCA focusses on individual cases; it is characterized by a holistic view, manifest in seeing cases as configurations of their properties; the calibration of values that are needed for the analysis (see later) is theory-based, and quantitative scales do not always represent the best choice (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 32ff.); Boolean algebra as the underlying mathematics is an algebra that does not “count” as linear algebra does, but just refers to the (qualitative) presence or absence of properties; a moving between ideas and evidence is possible, if not desired (Ragin 1994, 76; 2004, 126; Scharpf 2002, 219; Munck 2004, 119); and probabilities do not play any role.¹⁵

After giving this overview of how to decompose the acronym QCA in its single parts, some specification is at stake: nowadays, the acronym is usually enlarged by some addition that describes the specific *variant* of QCA. For example, csQCA (“crisp-set QCA”) describes those analyses where all conditions and the outcome can only be present or absent, expressed by the values 1 and 0. Instead, in an fsQCA (“fuzzy-set QCA”; introduced by Ragin 2000), gradings of presence and absence are allowed. A social movement cannot only be successful (“1”) or not (“0”), but also mostly successful (“0.8”), more successful than not (“0.6”), and so on. It goes without saying that such a fuzzy variant is extremely useful for social science questions, since most concepts with which social scientists work undergo gradings by their very nature.¹⁶ A country can still be a democracy, even if there are countries that fulfill the requirements for a country to be defined a democracy in an even stronger way.

This, of course, raises the question where the gradings come from. In brief, calibration is a kind of a numeric expression of concept formation (for

concept formation, see the overviews in Goertz 2006a and Mair 2008): a fuzzy value should express the extent to which a given concept is present or absent in a given case. This requires a double knowledge: knowledge about the concept, and knowledge about the case. There cannot be a recipe on how this knowledge can be gained. A plenitude of potential sources is imaginable. Amenta et al. (2009) work with a (quantitative) content analysis on newspaper coverage; Wagemann (2005) combines standardized questionnaires, expert interviews, and documents in order to gain knowledge about organizational change in business interest associations; in their micro-sociological study on entry to the labor market, Hollstein and Wagemann (2014) rely on 12,000 pages of transcribed narrative interviews with young people; for their policy study on private energy consumption, Mayer et al. (2011) conduct a legal and institutional analysis; and so on. Generally, any technique-oriented procedure qualifies for a potential source of concept formation and, in consequence, of the definition of fuzzy values. In this sense, QCA can be clearly understood as an integrative research design for which various kinds of qualitative and quantitative data sources can be used (see also Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 32ff.).¹⁷ However, it should not be negated that there is the risk that calibration is conducted superficially, if not arbitrarily. While this issue should certainly be taken seriously (see also Milan 2014, Chapter 18 of this volume, on research ethics), some qualifications have to be made. First, mistakes in calibration can usually be detected quite easily: attributing a high democracy value to a country such as North Korea, or defining health policy as an important target of social movement activities, certainly constitutes a mistake. Second, smaller changes in calibration do not necessarily lead to significant changes in the analytical result: only if a value is changed from below 0.5 to above 0.5 (or vice versa), might stronger effects on the results be observed (see a more in-depth discussion of this point in Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 287ff.). And third, the calibration of dichotomous sets is not necessarily easier than the calibration of fuzzy sets: to decide whether or not a movement is successful is not easier than assigning “success values” to a social movement. In general, we can hold that calibration requires a double knowledge, namely knowledge about the concept and knowledge about the case. In any case, the aim of calibration procedures is to arrive at a fuzzy scale, where the fuzzy values represent the degree of presence of the concept under analysis. Quoting Ragin, “[i]n the hands of a social scientist [. . .], a fuzzy set can be seen as a fine-grained, continuous measure that has been carefully calibrated using substantive and theoretical knowledge” (Ragin 2000, 7).

Note that a fuzzy scale seems very similar to an ordinal scale, as we know it from conventional quantitative methodology. However, there is an important feature which is exclusive to fuzzy scales, namely that the *qualitative* distinction, manifest in the implicit dichotomy, is still maintained. A fuzzy scale

of “success” is not just a rank order of various success levels, but takes into account the underlying dichotomy of success *versus* non-success. As such, a fuzzy scale is nothing else but a more flexible and more precise version of the underlying dichotomy; it thus captures both “differences in kind” (something which is also achieved with a crisp set) and “differences in degree” (something which is also achieved with an ordinal or interval scale as known in statistics) (see also Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 30). Following this logic, a crisp set in which only the values 0 and 1 are realized is the shortest version of a fuzzy scale. Therefore, it is not even correct to list csQCA and fsQCA as two different variants of QCA; rather, csQCA is a special case of fsQCA.

Sometimes, more variants of QCA are mentioned: one is mvQCA (multi-value QCA; Cronqvist and Berg-Schlösser 2009). This includes in the analysis multinominal categories that are *not* implicitly dichotomous (e.g., different types of social movements; different types of social movement activities; different forms of protests, and so on). While this sounds extremely useful, mvQCA has some shortcomings which—in the opinion of some authors (e.g., Vink and Van Vliet 2009)—make its application rather problematic. There are not only doubts about the set-theoretic nature of mvQCA (Vink and Van Vliet 2009, 273), but the analytical potential of mvQCA also seems to be rather limited. For example, the outcome cannot be multinomial in mvQCA (Cronqvist and Berg-Schlösser 2009, 84), and even for the conditions, the advice is to not go beyond more than four categories (Cronqvist and Berg-Schlösser 2009). Finally, as Schneider and Wagemann (2012, 262, fn. 12) demonstrate, mvQCA can be easily replaced with a csQCA (or fsQCA) in which the multinomial categories are treated in a way that corresponds to “dummy variables” in regression analysis.

Another variant of QCA is tQCA (temporal QCA; see Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 269ff.). Since the lack of time-sensitivity has led to some criticism about QCA as a method (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 264), initiatives have been launched which aimed at an integration of the time aspect into QCA methodology. Caren and Panofsky’s (2005) specific strategy has become known as tQCA, which takes time sequences into account through the use of the logical operator “THEN.” From this, a full new range of technical procedures emerges. However, trying to get hold of such a difficult analytical concept as time complicates the analysis considerably, and therefore Caren and Panofsky already admit that the necessities of practical application require a rather limited inclusion of time into the analysis where many assumptions are made about time sequences. Ragin and Strand (2008) go even further by demonstrating that, with a creative way of formulating conditions, the same analytical results can be achieved with csQCA and fsQCA as with tQCA.¹⁸

In brief, while mvQCA and tQCA sound like attractive solutions for the obvious shortcomings of QCA as a method (such as the necessity to think in

dichotomies, and the basic static nature of QCA), they do not really add to what already exists. If we furthermore acknowledge that csQCA is nothing more than a special case of fsQCA, then we can dare to make the claim that the state of the art of QCA is what is currently represented by the rules and practices of fsQCA.

What Does QCA Do?

After clarifying what QCA is, let us now turn to a discussion of what QCA does. Already, it has become clear that QCA is a set-theoretic method to unravel necessary and sufficient conditions. Thinking in these terms is quite common in the social sciences (Mahoney 2004), as is specifically underlined by Goertz (2003) for necessary conditions and by Ragin (2000) for sufficient conditions. As mentioned, one mode to express this way of thinking is the formulation of “if . . . then . . .” hypotheses. The expression “if X then Y” (in formal notation: $X \rightarrow Y$) denotes X as a sufficient condition for the outcome Y—already the presence of X suffices in order for Y to be present.¹⁹ As for necessary conditions, the direction of the relation is inverted and less straightforward: since necessity is defined for the situation in which the presence of Y always coincides with the presence of X, this has to be expressed with the statement “if Y then X” ($X \leftarrow Y$). This is confusing, because we usually think of “if . . . then . . .” statements (and arrows in notational systems) in form of causal directions (the “if” causes the “then”); however, this is too short an interpretation. In fact, “if . . . then . . .” statements are much broader statements about set relations which only express that one set (described by the “if” component) is contained in the other set (described by the “then” component). In case of sufficiency this means that, whenever we find the “if” component (i.e., the sufficient condition), there is also the “then” component (i.e., the outcome). In case of necessity, the “if” component is the outcome and the “then” component the necessary condition: wherever we find the outcome, we also find the necessary condition. The set relation has already been introduced: a sufficient condition is a subset of the outcome, while a necessary condition is a superset of the outcome.

The technical features of QCA enable a researcher to go beyond a simple analysis of sufficient and necessary conditions, but also to analyze the various interactions among individual conditions. Indeed, QCA can bring about rather sophisticated results. Let us imagine a hypothetical result of an analysis of sufficiency with three conditions A, B, and C:

$$A * B + \sim A * C \rightarrow Y.$$

The fact that this is analysis of sufficiency is expressed by the direction of the arrow (\Rightarrow). The operator ($*$) has to be read as a logical AND, and the operator ($+$) as a logical OR. The tilde (\sim) expresses the absence of a condition or the outcome. With these verbalizations in mind, the hypothetical result reads as follows: “The combination of presence of the conditions A and B, or the combination of the absence of A and the presence of C, are sufficient conditions for Y.” As we see from this formulation, there are two sufficient combinations of conditions, expressed by the logical OR: $A*B$ and $\sim A*C$. Both sufficient combinations are then composed of two elements: the first one by A and B and the second one by $\sim A$ and C. In order for the sufficient conditions to be present (and thus to work as sufficient conditions), *both* elements have to be present. As for the first combination, B alone is not sufficient: only when combined with A does it become a sufficient condition.

The methodological literature knows these conditions as INUS conditions. INUS is the acronym for a condition that is an “insufficient but necessary part of a condition which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the result” (Mackie 1974, 62).²⁰ Without a doubt, being able to account for these INUS conditions which are neither sufficient nor necessary, but are still part of the causal explanation, represents a very complex and advanced way of dealing with causality. Just consider the role of condition A: not only if it is present can it be part of a sufficient condition, but also if it is absent; its presence has to be combined with B and its absence with C.

There are also two technical terms that capture this form of causal complexity, namely equifinality and conjunctural causation. Equifinality refers to the fact that such a solution does not only offer one path through which the outcome can be explained, but that there are various explanations which neither compete with nor contradict each other. It goes without saying that this is a very helpful feature in social science research, where it is an illusion to think that there is only one explanation that accounts for all instances of the phenomenon. This is especially true for complex social processes or the analysis of complex organizations, such as social movement organizations. It is no wonder that Cress and Snow (2000), in their analysis on homeless’ organizations, or Giugni and Nai (2013), when looking at global justice organizations, arrive at various explanatory paths which partially, but not completely, overlap.

Conjunctural causation, by contrast, refers to the fact that conditions or causes often do not unfold their causal power alone, but only in combination with other factors. Speaking in notational terms, while equifinality is expressed through the OR operator ($+$) in a solution formula, conjunctural causation appears in the AND operator ($*$). As such, QCA overcomes the somewhat unrealistic necessity of conditional independence which is claimed for social science research (King et al. 1994). This basically means that it seems to be required that single causes do not overlap with one another and can be

kept analytically separate; however, as research practice (but also common sense) shows, such an idea is unrealistic.²¹ QCA makes positive use of this observation, allowing explicitly, if not even being built upon, the very idea of intersections and overlaps of conditions. As such, Hollstein and Wagemann (2014) arrive at various constellations of young people's biographical characteristics which make their search for jobs successful or not.

It is a bit more difficult to apply similar principles to the analysis of necessity. Also in the QCA algorithm, the analysis of necessary conditions is rather straightforward and does not require much technical knowledge.²² A central reason for this is that conjunctural necessary conditions do not make sense. A conjunction (e.g., $A*B$) is only necessary if both its components are necessary. If the presence of A and B as a combination is required, this means that the combination has to be present; and a combination is present if both its components are present. Thus, instead of analyzing conjunctions, it is already sufficient to only analyze the components of conjunctions.

However, while this would mean that only statements with one condition, such as "A is necessary for Y" would be possible, and since this would be a bit banal for a sophisticated method such as QCA, an additional feature is used, namely the reference to "functional equivalents" (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 74). Differently from a conjunction, which is defined through the logical AND, a functional equivalent is based on the logical OR. Necessity is attributed to the presence of a condition A OR an alternative condition B. In other words: at least one of the functionally equivalent necessary conditions is always present, if the outcome is present. This can be notated as follows:

$$A + B \leftarrow Y.$$

It goes without saying that A and B in this case cease to be necessary conditions on their own. We can even imagine more sophisticated ways of expressing necessity, such as:

$$(A + B)*(C + D) \leftarrow Y.$$

In that case, A, B, C, and D correspond to what has been coined SUIN conditions and are seen as the mirror phenomenon to INUS conditions. A SUIN condition is defined as a "sufficient, but unnecessary part of a factor that is insufficient, but necessary for the result" (Mahoney et al. 2009, 126). In other, more simple, but less precise words: SUIN conditions represent mutually alternative necessary conditions where the presence of one of the conditions is already sufficient to constitute a necessary condition. The basic principle behind SUIN conditions is that of a *functional* equivalence. It is not

recommended to combine through a logical OR all possible conditions, no matter whether they can functionally replace one another as necessary conditions or not. It would be possible to find such a functional equivalence, for example, between the presence of strong left-wing parties and the presence of strong trade unions, because both stand for one and the same underlying macro-concept, namely that of the presence of strong left-wing political actors. However, this functional equivalence has to be theoretically grounded. Otherwise, one would risk creating endless chains of seemingly functional equivalents; these would automatically become a necessary condition, because an endless series of conditions would be equal to claiming that it is necessary for the outcome to appear that *any* condition is present. Therefore, while AND conjunctions in the analysis of sufficiency can also be used without any theoretical coherence, this is not the case for OR-based functional equivalents in the analysis of necessity. Thus, care is required in their application.

Asymmetric causal relations constitute a shared pattern between the analysis of sufficient and necessary conditions. Let us illustrate this with sufficient conditions first. If we only allow for presence and absence of conditions and outcomes, four potential situations can be created for one condition and an outcome: the condition and the outcome are both present; they are both absent; only the condition is present, but not the outcome; and only the outcome is present, but not the condition. In order for a condition to be sufficient, no cases are allowed in which the condition is present, but the outcome is absent. If these cases did exist, then the condition would not have been a sufficient one. If we represent this in a two-by-two table that imitates the general principles of a scatter plot (X in the horizontal axis, high values to the right; Y in the vertical axis, high values to the top), a sufficient condition can be represented as shown in Tables 3.1a and 3.1b.

Table 3.1a Sufficiency—Two-by-Two Table and XY Plot

	X	
	0	1
Y	1	Cases allowed
	0	Cases <i>not</i> allowed

Sufficient condition

Table 3.1b Exemplary XY Plot

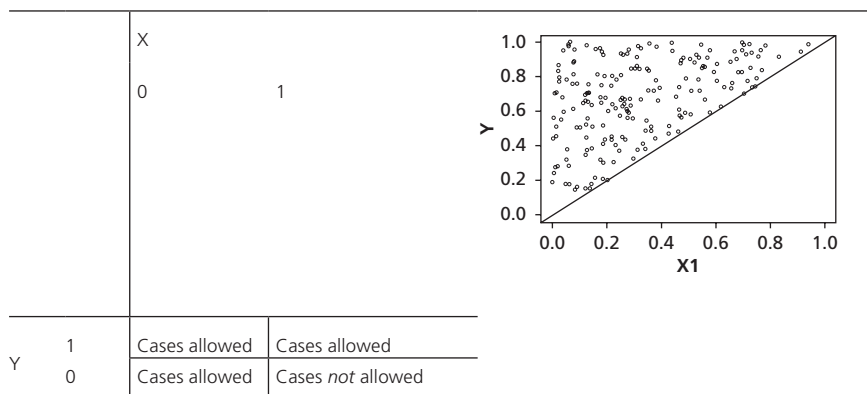
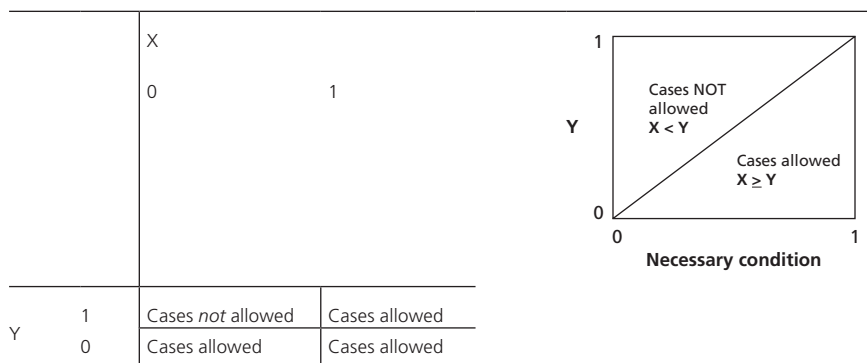


Table 3.2 Necessity—Two-by-Two Table and XY Plot



It becomes immediately clear that this is not a symmetric situation, but that the cells where cases are allowed are situated in a triangular form. By contrast, a statistical analysis would have produced high correlation measures (e.g., χ^2 values or Cramér’s v) only if cases were predominantly on only one of the two diagonals; that is, if they were symmetrically organized. This is even more visible for fuzzy sets, where a condition is sufficient if its values are always smaller than or equal to the values of the outcome (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 67). This produces a plot where, in case of a sufficient condition, all cases are above the diagonal and take on a triangular form.

For necessary conditions, the situation is exactly the contrary. However, it is still asymmetric, as shown in Table 3.2.

The plot for fuzzy sets shows all cases below the diagonal, since a condition is necessary if the fuzzy value of the condition is greater than or equal to the value of the outcome (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 76). Again, the plot is triangular, and thus asymmetric.

How Does QCA Work?

It is obviously not possible to give a full and complete introduction into the technicalities of QCA in a rather short contribution (for longer and comprehensive textbook-style introductions, see Ragin 2008; Rihoux and Ragin 2009; Schneider and Wagemann 2012). Nevertheless, the principles of a QCA analysis can be briefly demonstrated. Obvious phases of a research design, such as the definition of the research question, the formulation of hypotheses, or concept formation (see also Schmitter 2008) shall be left out. For now, let us assume that all conditions and the outcome are already defined and conceptualized.

The first subsequent step is the calibration of fuzzy values. A data matrix has to be filled which contains a fuzzy value for every cell, describing the condition/the outcome for every specific case (for calibration strategies, see Ragin 2008, 85ff. and Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 32ff.). This step of calibrating fuzzy values is central to a QCA: it is here where observations about the social world, as they could also be represented in written texts, are converted into a fuzzy set data matrix.

This data matrix already suffices for an analysis of necessary conditions. The rule, derived from fuzzy algebra, is that a condition is necessary if the fuzzy values of the condition are greater than or equal to the fuzzy values of the outcome, for all cases (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 76). Thus, case by case has to be carefully analyzed; only if all these checks reveal the fuzzy values of the condition being greater than or equal to the fuzzy values of the outcome can the condition be defined as fully necessary. However, this is rarely the case in research practice. Ragin (2006) has proposed parameters of fit in order to allow for some qualification of necessity (and sufficiency) statements. The consistency parameter tells the researcher how far the claim that a given condition is necessary (or sufficient) is backed by the empirical evidence (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 139ff.). The higher the consistency value, the more certain can the researchers be with their necessity statements. A value of at least 0.9 is recommended (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 278).²³ However, there is also a second parameter, namely the coverage value, whose interpretation is different between the analysis of necessary and sufficient conditions: in case of necessary conditions, it indicates the extent

to which the necessary condition is trivial. If we formulate “air to breathe” as a necessary condition for successful protest events, then this is obviously trivial, because “air to breathe” is a necessary condition for many more phenomena than just for protest events. This trivialness is assessed by the coverage parameter.²⁴

While the analysis of necessary conditions is straightforward, the analysis of sufficient conditions requires some more steps.

First, the data matrix has to be converted into a truth table (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 93ff.). A truth table does not list the single cases, but the theoretically possible configurations of conditions into which the single cases are summarized. Thus, if single cases are equal (or, in case of fuzzy sets, similar) to one another, then they will be part of the same configuration and the same truth-table row. This step replaces the cases by the configurations to which they belong. Obviously, it can happen very easily that more than one case is grouped in one and the same configuration; but it can also happen that a configuration of properties exists in theory, but not in the empirical world. For example, the configuration of the factors “being the US president” and “being female” does not exist, since there has never been a female American president. There are various sources that bring about these so-called “logical remainders” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 153ff.); the phenomenon as such is called “limited diversity” (see also the comments about diversity in n. 5). Most often, limited diversity goes back to the fact that the social world is shaped and influenced by many (also historical) processes which limit the range of available configurations.

Such a truth-table will always have 2^k rows (i.e., configurations), with k being the number of conditions. An analysis based on four conditions will thus produce sixteen rows. Limited diversity can only be avoided if there are indeed sixteen cases that belong to different configurations. (Note: just having sixteen cases is not enough—they have to describe *different* configurations.) The number of truth-table rows grows exponentially: with ten conditions, no less than 1,024 truth-table rows are produced. It goes without saying that this puts a limit to an exaggerated extension of the number of conditions. While limited diversity can be controlled for (for proposals, see Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 160ff.), this phenomenon should nevertheless not be dominant in an analysis.

The second step of the analysis of sufficiency is to assess for every single truth-table row, whether it constitutes a sufficient condition for the outcome or not. The rule, contrary to the analysis of necessity, is now that a condition is sufficient if its fuzzy value is smaller than or equal to the fuzzy value of the outcome, for all cases (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 67). Note that this has to be done for every truth-table row. In other words: as many small analyses of sufficiency have to be performed as there are truth-table rows.²⁵

However, as is the case with necessity, often, it is an illusion to expect sufficiency to be perfect. Again, the consistency value describes how well the empirical data supports the claim of sufficiency (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 123ff.). In the case of the analysis of sufficiency, the acceptable consistency values can be lower than for the analysis of necessity; values such as 0.75 are often deemed acceptable (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 279). Nevertheless, it is recommended to have a close look at which case(s) exactly lead(s) to the deviance of consistency values from the ideal value of 1.

Once these consistency values have been calculated for every truth-table row, the researcher has to decide whether consistency is high enough to define the combination of conditions that is represented by the truth-table row as sufficient for the outcome. The result of this procedure is an assessment of every truth-table row.

The third step is then to find communalities between the various truth-table rows that have been identified as sufficient conditions. If, for example, a truth-table row described as $A*B$ is defined as sufficient for the outcome, and another truth-table row $A*\sim B$ is also defined as sufficient, then this can be shortened by saying that A is a sufficient condition for the outcome. This procedure is also called “logical minimization” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 104ff.). The basic idea behind this is to search for communalities within the configurations that have already been defined as sufficient. The result is a parsimonious expression of sufficiency.

At this point, of course, the question emerges as to what has to be done with those rows that had been identified as logical remainders; that is, those rows that lack enough empirical evidence. With regard to the second step described above, the question is how sufficiency can be assessed for a row that is void of cases. Indeed, there are various responses to this problem. One is very simply that logical remainders *cannot* be defined as sufficient conditions. Another response is that they *can* be defined as sufficient conditions, as long as they contribute to the parsimony of the final result. Many other proposals exist, such as the inclusion of thought experiments and counterfactual reasoning (for these strategies, see Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 160ff.). However, no matter which strategy is chosen, two points have to be made: first, limited diversity, as a problem can never be “solved”—it is only possible to develop strategies to *deal* with this phenomenon. Cases that do not exist cannot simply be invented. Second, although various strategies result in different solution formulas, none of these formulas is incorrect. They are all based on empirical evidence. The differences do not stem from a different treatment of configurations that are related to empirical data, but from a different strategy on how to deal with logical remainders; that is, those configurations that are not empirically represented.

Nevertheless, it cannot be negated that limited diversity is the core problem of QCA applications.

As is the case with other methods, it is not only important to apply QCA *correctly*, but also *qualitatively well*. This has led to the development of a “Code of Good Standard,” which should be closely observed (for long versions, see Wagemann and Schneider 2010 and Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 275ff.). Transparency is certainly the most fundamental principle of this quality requirement. QCA is mainly a *qualitative* method in which theoretical assignments made by researchers are central. First and foremost, this concerns calibration strategies (including the decision to use fuzzy sets or crisp sets), but also various other elements of a QCA (such as providing the truth table, indicating consistency and coverage values, naming truly contradictory cases, and so on); researchers should always be explicit about their choices. In addition, it is important to underline that no interpretation of a QCA should ignore the basic characteristics of a QCA design: for example, single conditions of a solution should not be interpreted in an isolated way, but the interpretative focus should always be on the conjunctions; or, for example, when interpreting results, these should always be linked back to the cases, since they are at the center of the scientific attention.

Finally, such “good conduct” should also include the idea that fundamental principles of comparative research, such as those related to case selection or to the definition and conceptualization of the conditions and the outcome, are obviously also valid for QCA: the fact that QCA relies on a computer algorithm does not allow the researcher to abstain from fundamental rules of comparative methods.

Social movements have mainly been researched with so-called “qualitative methods”—quantitative, statistics-based approaches have been used to a lesser extent (Walgrave and Wagemann 2010). Also, some features of QCA might have hindered its broad diffusion in the field of social movement studies: for example, its definition as a causal method (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 8) does not make it appear well suited for exploratory analyses, which occur quite frequently in social movement research. Also, it is certainly a problem that the number of “variables” (or “conditions,” in QCA terminology) undergoes certain restrictions, stemming from the needs of the formalized truth-table analysis. Nevertheless, a comparative setting with relatively specifically defined hypotheses is imaginable in which social movements can be object to a QCA analysis; for example, Giugni and Yamasaki (2009) replicated a previous quantitative study on the policy impact of several types of movements. Watanabe (2007) has an even broader interest in that he tests various (macro) theories of social movement emergence. Amenta et al. (2009) go in a similar direction, combining a content analysis of *The New York Times* with QCA, defining newspaper coverage of social movement organizations as the outcome of their study; they arrive at the conclusion that the combination of disruption, resource mobilization, and an enforced policy is a sufficient condition, while the potential condition “partisanship” is not part of the

equifinal conjunctural solution. Cress and Snow (2000) look at homeless organizations, identifying potential resources for successful movements of homeless people; in a fairly complex design, they organize their outcome in various dimensions (representation, resources, rights, relief, and significant impact) and identify between two and four composed sufficient conditions for each of them (Cress and Snow 2000, 1083). Following their abstract, “the study highlights the importance of organizational viability and the rhetorical quality of diagnostic and prognostic frames for securing outcomes while identifying a contingent relationship between tactics and political environment” (Cress and Snow 2000, 1063). Giugni and Nai (2013) look at decision making in 15 Swiss global justice SMOs, defining consensus-oriented structures as their positive outcome. Their solutions identify two main and two minor paths which count as sufficient conditions for the outcome (Giugni and Nai 2013, 34): the two main paths are the combination of smallness and the status as a *new* social movement organization; and the combination of smallness, a participative model, and internationality. Their two minor paths only describe one association each and can count as idiosyncratic accounts for the outcome in two specific cases. Being an organizational study (although not on social movement organizations), Wagemann’s (2005) analysis of dairy associations shows how organizational change follows development paths which reflect the nature of the single associations.

Perspectives of QCA

This contribution started with the observation that there are different understandings of “method.” QCA is certainly an analytical technique that requires highly standardized knowledge of a given algorithm and underlying mathematics. Of course, the algorithm works for many different research settings, independently from substance and epistemological considerations. However, such an unreflected use of QCA would risk the destiny of much of statistical analysis, namely a purely technical and erratic application of rules to social phenomena. Instead, QCA should be seen within a bigger picture, namely within the realm of methodological *approaches*. As such, QCA offers a specific view on the social world which is focused on diversity, on comparison, on case orientation, and, most importantly, on set-theoretic relations. It does not make any sense to consider an application of QCA if these important features are not met. However, if they are met, then QCA offers a powerful frame within which social science research can be placed. This seems to be desirable above all for research areas such as social movement studies, which are characterized by a multitude of approaches (Klandermans and Staggenborg

2002). Calibration techniques offer a well-suited possibility to integrate various ways of understanding and describing the social world: insights from narrative in-depth interviews can be elaborated (and understood better) through a fuzzy value as well as quantitative survey data. Certainly, analytical depth gets lost if highly sophisticated and very detailed observations have to be converted into fuzzy values; but this way of summarizing knowledge also helps to standardize scientific results. And it is, of course, not excluded to add other research modules, such as an in-depth explanation of selected cases, to a QCA.

■ NOTES

1. In this sense, QCA offers itself as a typical “mixed methods” or “triangular” (for the historical formulation, see Campbell and Fiske 1959, 38f.; for more recent accounts, see Seawright and Collier 2004, 310; Tarrow 2004, 174; della Porta and Keating 2008, 34) research design (for an example with explicit references to the mixed methods component, see Hollstein and Wagemann 2014). This also means that topics such as the subjectivity of qualitative research (Bryman 2012, 405) or ethical issues are indeed important for QCA—but not in a different manner from the data collection techniques being used.
2. I am grateful to Jonas Buche, Donatella della Porta, Christoph Klement, Juan Masullo, Markus Siewert, and the participants of the seminar “Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research,” held at the European University Institute (EUI), Florence, in April 2013, for their helpful comments.
3. The MDSD and the MSSD take up much older ideas, developed by John Stuart Mill (for a good systematic presentation, see Skocpol 1984, 379). Mill’s “Method of Agreement” roughly corresponds to the MDSD, while his “Method of Difference” is largely equivalent to the MSSD.
4. A good microsociological example is to break down individual biographies or career developments (such as in Hollstein and Wagemann 2014) and to group individuals according to the properties by which they are characterized.
5. There is also a (not only) technical reason for this need of diversity: “Limited Diversity” is a huge problem in every QCA (see Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 151ff.; Schneider and Wagemann 2013, 211), since the QCA algorithm requires decisions on whether or not a configuration of properties can count as a sufficient condition for the outcome. If, however, a configuration under examination is not represented by any empirically observable case, the researcher is in trouble: there is no way to determine the sufficiency of a given configuration if there is no empirical case that represents the configuration. Thus, if diversity among the cases is limited, the researcher faces severe difficulties in the analysis.
6. Technically speaking, a number of k different properties require 2^k possible configurations. Note that the number of cases that is needed is usually much higher than 2^k , since two or more cases can represent one and the same configuration. For the analysis of four cases, we could, strictly speaking, analyze no more than two conditions ($2^2 = 4$), assuming that the four cases are different with regard to these two conditions.
7. There is absolutely no technical reason why QCA could not be applied to large numbers of cases. However, it might then be difficult to arrive at theoretically sound calibrations of

fuzzy values (see later). Also, research practice has shown that the “parameters of fit” (that is, consistency and coverage) tend to be worse for high numbers of cases.

8. Note that this is the central meaning of the word “analysis” which, in its Ancient Greek origin, means that something is divided into its constituent units.
9. Co-variational hypotheses are usually formulated in a “the more . . . the more . . .” way.
10. Of course, the rule also works when we say that the outcome is always a true subset of the necessary condition.
11. QCA even makes technical use of this typological understanding of set theory when set-theoretic descriptions of ideal types (“configurations”) are used as truth-table rows for formal analysis (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 96ff.), integrating thus Lazarsfeld’s (1937) earlier work on property spaces—also this very early account of concept formation—into the algorithm.
12. Goertz and Mahoney even define qualitative research through the use of set theory (Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 16ff.)—of course, alternative interpretations of what “qualitative” means exist.
13. The French acronym is AQQC, standing for *Analyse quali-quantitative comparée* (DeMeur and Rihoux 2002), thus leaving open a clear decision in favor of or against a variant.
14. This similarity has led Schneider and Grofman (2006) to reflect about the ways and modes of visualization in which regression analysis and QCA present their results.
15. Note that this does not mean that all QCA analyses are deterministic; the parameter of “consistency” allows for deviance from a fully deterministic analytical result (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 123ff., 324). However, although not being deterministic, QCA results still do not have anything to do with probabilities.
16. Paradoxically, above all Giovanni Sartori, who is said to have contributed extensively to the discussion on concept formation in the social sciences (Mair 2008), is critical about the use of gradings; for him, concept formation is dichotomous by nature, since concepts are based on clear-cut classifications (Sartori 1970, 1038, 1040).
17. In case of existing quantitative data, there is a technical procedure which converts them into fuzzy scales without losing the qualitative information (“differences in kind”) contained in the data (Ragin 2008, 85ff.).
18. It is certainly a promising research agenda to integrate time aspects further into QCA, even if not creating an algorithm. Concatenations (Gambetta 1998), sequences (Tilly 2001), or sequence elaboration (Mahoney et al. 2009) promise good starting points.
19. This should not be confused with the expression that “X leads to Y.” While sufficiency is a kind of pre-condition for a statement that includes the verb “to lead,” such a statement can only be maintained if the researcher is also able to trace a causal mechanism (Mahoney 2003, 363) that links the sufficient condition and the outcome.
 In general, note that the famous quote from statistics that “correlation is not causation” (see Pearson 1930, 1, for correlation being a kind of weaker notion of causality, and Aldrich 1995 for a methodological discussion on the two terms) can also be converted to QCA: once researchers have found sufficient or necessary conditions, or INUS or SUIN conditions (see below), causal *mechanisms* (Gerring 2007, 43ff.; Goertz and Mahoney 2012, 100) still have to be established. After a QCA, researchers know the patterns, but often still have to investigate the reasons.
20. The quote can be understood more easily if the word “condition” is specified better and reformulated as “combination of conditions.”

21. Indeed, when “interactions” have to be modeled in statistical techniques, this can only be done up to a certain extent, and usually complicates the model.
22. This is also why most of the available (text)books on QCA concentrate on the analysis of sufficient conditions. Less skilled users might even confuse QCA with the analysis of sufficient conditions.
23. The reason for this rather high threshold is to avoid potential pitfalls such as “false necessary conditions” or “hidden necessary conditions” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 221ff.).
24. However, note that the coverage parameter proposed by Ragin is problematic in certain exceptional data settings; therefore, alternative proposals have been made (Goertz 2006; Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 236). When using Ragin’s measure, applicants should not automatically trust the relatively high values of the coverage measure. Note that an excessive reliance on functional equivalents in the assessment of necessary conditions (see earlier) raises consistency values by default, but also decreases coverage values, since the statement becomes banal.
25. In order to do this, for every truth-table row, every case’s fuzzy set membership has to be calculated with regard to the conjunction described by the truth-table row. This calculation of fuzzy memberships follows the rules from set theory (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 42ff.); the shortness of this text does not allow for a more in-depth presentation of this rather technical part of the procedure (see Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 182ff. for a more extensive description).

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4 Triangulation in Social Movement Research

*Phillip M. Ayoub, Sophia J. Wallace, and
Chris Zepeda-Millán*

Given the dynamic nature of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2006) and the array of methods that can be used to study it (see Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002), it is not surprising that prominent social movement scholars have promoted the use of multiple data sources and collection methods (Tarrow 2004; della Porta and Keating 2008, 34), or *triangulation*, when conducting research. Alongside the many merits of triangulation, the research design introduces several complexities related to systematically combining and analyzing different types of data in unison. In what follows, we address both the benefits and concerns related to mixed-method approaches, followed by illustrative examples of how to select and effectively apply the appropriate methods with which to address a given research problem. Drawing on examples from our own work on transnational Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) rights activism in Europe and immigrant rights activism in the United States, we demonstrate how the use of multiple methods and data sources can shed light on often neglected areas of social movement research, such as the diffusion of norms across borders and the relationship between time, space, and protests. We conclude with a discussion of publishing research using mixed-method research designs.

Defining Triangulation

The term “triangulation” has multiple meanings in the social sciences. It can refer to the use of a combination of methods of investigation, data sources, or theoretical frameworks (Jick 1979; Creswell 2014), and it is said to serve as “a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and methods” (Yeasmin and Rahman 2012, 156). The main idea behind the concept is that by utilizing multiple methods, data sources, theories, and/or observations, scholars can better account for and overcome the limits and biases inherent in studies that employ a single method, theory, data source,

or observer (Yeasmin and Rahman 2012, 157; see also Greene et al. 1989). For our purposes, triangulation refers to the use of multiple research methods and types of data to analyze the same problem. Throughout the chapter, we argue that triangulation allows for the analyst to paint a more holistic picture of the complex phenomena that social movement scholars study. Beyond functioning as a validating strategy, we see it as an approach for sound explanation, enhanced theory-building capacity, and deeper understanding.

As can be inferred from the various approaches discussed in this book, the use of multiple methods and types of data in problem-driven research can take many forms. It can include only qualitative methodology, for example, as illustrated by the many social movement studies that employ a mixture of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and archival research (e.g., Fantasia 1988; Rupp and Taylor 2003). It can also include combinations of large-n and small-n research designs (e.g., Mansbridge 1986; McAdam 1988; Banaszak 1996). In the triangulation examples we describe in this chapter, we focus on the latter combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, a combination that has been the most contested in terms of epistemology and execution.

Scholars can mix qualitative and quantitative data at four different stages of their research process: during *design*, *data collection*, *analysis*, and/or *interpretation* (see Creswell and Clark 2011, 66–8). As will be illustrated with the applied examples from our own work presented below, the choice to triangulate can be “fixed,” decided on before the research is undertaken, or “emergent,” in response to questions or problems that arise during the research or data analysis process (Creswell and Clark 2011, 54). Upon deciding on the need to triangulate, scholars must also select the *type* of mixed-method design that best suits their particular research questions or interests. The three most commonly used mixed-method research designs are *convergent parallel*, *explanatory sequential*, and *exploratory sequential* (see Creswell and Clark 2011, 68–104).

According to Creswell (2014), in a *convergent* design qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed separately, and then compared to assess whether the findings contradict or confirm each other (219). An example of social movement scholars using this type of design is Ferree et al.’s (2002) seminal comparative examination of abortion discourse in Germany and the United States. In *Shaping Abortion Discourse*, public opinion surveys and quantitative content analysis of newspaper articles are triangulated with in-depth interviews of activists and journalists in both countries. Through their novel use of these quantitative and qualitative data, the authors made important empirical (setting a new standard for research on framing) and theoretical (further developing the concept of “discourse opportunity structures”) contributions to social movement research, while demonstrating how the strategies and actions of numerous state, media, and civil society actors

in different institutional and cultural contexts can interact to produce varying results.

Sequential mixed-method research designs can either be exploratory or explanatory. In *exploratory* designs, “the researcher starts by qualitatively exploring a topic before building to a second, quantitative phase” (Creswell and Clark 2011, 86). The main goal of these types of designs “is to generalize qualitative findings based on . . . the first phase to a larger sample gathered during the second [quantitative] phase” (86). In a recent example, based on a newly created comprehensive database of Jewish victimization in the Netherlands during the Holocaust, Braun (2013) identified four pairs of Dutch villages that were socially similar but differed significantly in terms of Jewish evasion. For each of these pairs, he consulted administrative records of German security forces and post-war testimonies which led to the hypothesis that Christian minority churches played a crucial role in the emergence of collective rescue networks because their leaders could exploit social isolation to set up clandestine movements. His inductively created hypothesis was then tested by pairing the quantitative database with geo-coded information of Christian church communities throughout the Netherlands. Through this exploratory sequential research design, Braun found that it was the structural position of Protestant or Catholic communities and not something inherent to either religion that produced collective networks of assistance to threatened Jewish neighbors.

Alternatively, in an *explanatory* sequential designs, “the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyzes the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build on to) the second, qualitative phase” of the research (Creswell 2014, 224). Several classic (Mansbridge 1986; McAdam 1988) and contemporary (Taylor et al. 2009; Hadden forthcoming) social movement studies have employed this type of triangulation. One of its main strengths is that it can help explain the mechanisms—how quantified variables interact—through the use of qualitative data (Creswell 2014, 224). Hadden’s (forthcoming) work on the international climate change movement, for example, combined quantitative network analysis with over 90 qualitative interviews. Her design aimed to explain how the tactical choices of social movement organizations are affected by their positions in an inter-organizational network. Hadden utilized qualitative interviews to provide evidence of the causal mechanisms underlying the correlations observed in the quantitative network analysis. Since senior social movement scholars have recently called for more mechanism-driven approaches to studying contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2006), the applied examples we describe in detail later also utilize this type of design. However, before we do so, we discuss more of the benefits, as well as some of the concerns and complexities, of mixed-method research.

BENEFITS: WHY AND WHEN TO USE TRIANGULATION

There are several benefits to triangulation, not least considering the fact that scholars of social movements have a toolkit of imperfect methods. Due to the complexity of the social world that we study, it is often impossible to achieve the laboratory-like experimental controls that are necessary to satisfy the conditions of the experimental method—championed by many to be the only method capable of eliminating alternative explanations and isolating variables of interest (Lijphart 1971; Jackman 1985; Kinder and Palfrey 1993). Instead, the statistical method is increasingly common in social movement research. With careful theoretical modeling and traveling concepts, this method can be used to quantitatively control for differences across units of analysis within a reasonable margin of error. According to some scholars, the ultimate goal of this method is causal inference, using observable data (the more observations, the better) to generalize about their effect on a particular outcome (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 8). While most scholars hold that the experimental and statistical methods bring us the closest to “science” (Jackman 1985), others have critically questioned the endeavor of imitating the hard sciences, given the different nature of what we research (Gaddis 1996).¹

At the height of the methods debate, the book *Designing Social Inquiry* (DSI) by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994), created uproar in the social sciences (especially in American political science departments) around its neo-positivist understanding of social science methodology. The common critique levied at the book was its somewhat narrow guidelines for qualitative researchers. It was this debate that also influenced prominent social movement scholars to reflect on the use of triangulation in social movements scholarship. In response to DSI, Sidney Tarrow (1995) advocated for triangulation, critiquing DSI’s central implication that qualitative research was valuable so long as it conformed to the main logics of the quantitative trade. Critics were quick to point out that the statistical method contains its own serious shortcomings that distinguish themselves from those of qualitative research. For one, DSI’s interpretation of causal inference placed emphasis on correlations and underplayed the causal pathway that connects the independent variable(s) to the dependent variable: the causal mechanism (Beck 2006). On its own, the quantitative method misses a plethora of relationships inherent in political research that deviate from the *x*-leads-to-*y* structure of statistical analysis (Hall 2003, 381).² Thus, the importance of deciphering “which mechanisms produce observed associations in the variables,” went overlooked by a method that emphasizes placing “variables in equations, and [exploring] how they are related to other variables” (Hedström and Swedberg 1998, 4).

The conceptual complexity of mechanism-driven research inherent in most qualitative methodology usually hones a study in on a specific case or

a smaller set of cases. A small-*n* approach to research heeds Sidney Verba's (1967, 113) earlier call for staying grounded to the context and ontology of a phenomenon, as opposed to striving for covering laws.³ Stripping attributes of what an observation is (in order to increase the number of observations required for statistical analysis), moves the research up on the ladder of abstraction, resulting in conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970; Goertz 2006). Yet in their complexity, the findings generated by small-*n* research designs can rarely make the bold statements that come naturally to quantitative studies. While small-*n* designs take us a long way towards theory generation, such research cannot rule out the possibility that the findings are unique to a specific context. The negative aspect of DSI was that it applied quantitative criteria as a baseline for evaluating all social science research, instead of exploiting the richness of qualitative logics. Perspectives like DSI make their strongest contribution by emphasizing the importance of systematic rigor, transparency, and communication among practitioners in the social sciences. The methods debate has been productive in this regard, and can improve the quality and reliability of our findings. Where this debate has become about "shared standards" however, it loses traction.

If the now decades-long debate on methodology has taught us anything, it is that establishing a clear hierarchy in the value of the effect-driven versus mechanism-driven research can be difficult. Instead, it has become increasingly clear that different methods make different contributions and come with different limitations. In this sense, triangulation has critical benefits in that the logics of distinct methods are understood to complement each other, as opposed to substituting for one another. In response to the methods debate, the field is applying pressure on researchers to address, if not include, both methodological angles. This means that qualitative researchers are expected to generalize and be systematic in their research (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994) and quantitative researchers are expected to explain how cause leads to effect (Brady and Collier 2004), an expectation that challenges the established division of labor in the social sciences. While a division of labor is effective in producing scholars with sound expertise in one area—opposed to mediocre expertise in many—we argue that a sharp divide can limit the questions one asks. If the goal is to address interesting questions, then it is essential that no single method preclude a thorough study of an important problem.

In that vein, we want to move beyond the polarization advocated by methodological imperialists, by arguing instead that—taken together—quantitative and qualitative methods (like the ones we explicate here) can answer different aspects of a question and lead to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Social movement scholars need to develop an awareness of the specificity of different methods, being mindful of their trade-offs for answering any particular question. Combining methodologies of differing persuasions, or *triangulating*, helps researchers get at different

dimensions of the research question, which we think reduces the distance between method and ontology—“the character of the world as it actually is” (Hall 2003, 374).

From an epistemological point of view, this move towards mixed methods is a positive development. The more expansive toolkit that generally comes with triangular research designs is especially fruitful for answering many questions in the field of social movement research. A central difficulty related to social movement research is that the analyst rarely knows the universe of cases from which to sample randomly. Triangulation can thus be particularly “appropriate in cases in which quantitative data are partial and qualitative investigation is obstructed by political conditions” (Tarrow 2004, 178). Furthermore, triangular methodology is well suited for the social movements field, since the field has generally remained skeptical of paradigm warfare and hard theory, thriving instead on the bridging of middle-range theory. As others have said before us, the “triangulation of methods ultimately produces stronger theories than multiple replications and permutations of the same method” (Tarrow, Klandermans, and Staggenborg 2002, 319).

By getting at different aspects of questions, employing triangular research designs also helps the researcher address methodological limitations and increases validity—the data are also crosschecked to increase the robustness of the findings. Endogeneity, for example, is a central problem in many social movement research projects: do open political opportunity structures lead to mobilization, or does mobilization open political opportunity structures? Quantitative analyses combined with qualitative process tracing in representative case studies can shed light on the directions that causal arrows take. Finally, qualitative data can be used to interpret the—at first often puzzling—findings of cross-sectional quantitative research. We now describe the challenges posed by triangulation and then present examples of our own work to illustrate how mixed-method social movement research can be employed to build theory and tackle complex questions.

CONCERNS AND COMPLEXITIES OF TRIANGULATION

Mixed-method research has been critiqued on both epistemic and ontological grounds. Ahmed and Sil (2009; 2012) contend, for instance, that the notion that multiple-method research (MMR) is better than single-method research (SMR) is based on the faulty premise that one type of method can offer external validity for the findings of a different type of method. They argue that because “different methods rest upon incommensurable epistemological foundations,” ultimately “MMR holds the same epistemological status as separate projects addressing the same question, and that SMR is no less likely to produce good scholarship” (Ahmed and Sil 2009, 3). For example, when

attempting to use a qualitative case study to confirm the findings of a large-n statistical analysis, “the case study will by its very nature introduce variables not present in the statistical analysis” (Ahmed and Sil 2009, 3). As such, both methods are “effectively examining two different sets of variables” and, thus, data gained from the qualitative case study “cannot be said to either confirm or falsify the findings” of the quantitative analysis (Ahmed and Sil 2009, 3). Consequently, critics argue that “error-reduction and cross-validation are not feasible where methods are not sufficiently similar in their basic ontologies and their conceptions of causality” (Rohlfing 2008, 1511; Ahmed and Sil 2012, 935).

In response, some scholars argue that those who critique mixed-method research on epistemological grounds “overstate how closely tied epistemological perspectives and every day practice are” since many quantitative researchers themselves “disagree over fundamental epistemological issues, such as the superiority of Bayesian or frequentist inference” (Small 2011, 78). In addition, other researchers contend that “by prioritizing the act of discovery over the justifications for knowledge,” mixed-method research embodies its own epistemological perspective based on “pragmatism” (Small 2011, 62). Collectively, according to Small, “the pragmatist researcher is first and foremost concerned with an empirical puzzle, solving it through whatever means appear useful in the process” (Small 2011, 63). Our problem-driven definition of triangulation thus stresses that different methods can be triangulated around aspects of a broader question. We also do not think it is common to find equivalent data that gets at a singular question. Nor do we propose that triangulation is always more suitable than SMR. Instead, we simply believe it depends on the question.

Scholars have also identified several challenges that arise when attempting to actually carry out multi-method research. The first, and perhaps most obvious, barrier that researchers must overcome is learning the skills needed to employ the qualitative and quantitative methods they seek to utilize (Creswell 2014, 219). Scholars must also gain familiarity with the different ways in which quantitative data can be collected and analyzed, including the logics of question development and hypothesis testing, how to construct measurement instruments, and how to use the statistical software needed for analysis (Creswell and Clark 2011, 13). At additional time and financial cost, social scientists must often supplement the training at their home institutions with specialized workshops, such as those offered by the Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR) and the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR).

Similarly, researchers should be capable of identifying the types of questions in their study that are best answered qualitatively and understand the different ways they can gather and analyze qualitative data, including the various types of coding techniques and data analysis programs that can be

used. Students should also be aware of the numerous data collection concerns related to qualitative methods, such as interview-based research. Important issues to consider include having the language skills needed to interview the population under examination, whether research assistants and/or translators need to be hired during fieldwork, and that the information obtained from interviews is collected in the same manner and using the same questions (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 23). Interview questions should also produce valid data, meaning that the interviewees should answer questions that clearly capture the concepts scholars are examining (Adcock and Collier 2001, 529). In addition, while increasing the number of interviews will, on average, produce the least biased answers by weakening any outlier responses, researchers must also be able to identify when their research comes to a point of “saturation,” where new data is no longer producing new information and patterns.

While most American political science departments tend to train their students primarily in quantitative methods (Schwartz-Shea 2003), an implication of the basic methodological skillset needed for conducting mixed-method research is that graduate programs that promote triangulation should offer and require coursework in both quantitative *and* qualitative methods. A positive trend in political science that may engender a multi-method approach (and diminish its costs) is the increase in co-authored works (Fisher et al. 1998). Co-authorship is one way to get around limited tools in our social enterprise, if two or more researchers analyze a problem together by approaching it from different angles. Wallace and Zepeda-Millán’s collaboration (described later) is an example in this direction.

Researchers should also carefully weigh the various costs and benefits associated with the amount of time and resources needed to conduct and analyze mixed-method research (Jick 1979; Klandermans et al. 2002, 315). For example, Ayoub spent twenty-five months in the field, between 2008 and 2012, conducting the data collection and analysis necessary to execute his research design. Likewise, Wallace, Zepeda-Millán, and Jones-Correa spent two years (2009–11) conducting an analysis of preliminary digital newspaper archival data that Zepeda-Millán collected in 2006 and interviews he conducted in four US cities between 2006 and 2009. The amount of time it takes to conduct mixed-method research is especially important to take note of when a study is carried out by a single scholar who may require additional training, has limited graduate program funding, or is nearing a promotional deadline (Ahmed and Sil 2009, 5). Furthermore, the amount of financial resources needed to pay for a research team, transcriptions, and qualitative and quantitative data analysis software and instruction is a challenge of mixed-method research that needs to be considered seriously in advance (Creswell and Clark 2011; Creswell 2014).

Other concerns that arise from multi-method studies are that they are not only often difficult to replicate (Jick 1979, 609), but when dogmatically held as the “gold standard” for social science research, scholars run the risk of neglecting the important insights gained from intensive single-method research. In this sense, there is a general fear that researchers may become less specialized in specific data collection and analysis techniques, opting instead for mediocre training in multiple methodological areas (Rohlfing 2008; Ahmed and Sil 2009, 2012). With these important caveats in mind, we turn now to making a case for triangular research designs, concurring with senior contentious politics scholars (Klandermans et al. 2002; Tarrow 2004) who argue that the use of multiple research methods and data sources can be beneficial to social movement research. While triangulation may not be well suited for every research question—nor is it feasible for every scholar or team of researchers—we believe that its benefits for theory building and investigating complex political phenomenon remain unparalleled. In what follows, we elaborate on this view and provide examples of how we circumvented several of the obstacles described here.

Applied Method Examples

In this section, we discuss our own work that exemplifies triangulation to demonstrate how scholars can use mixed methods in social movement research, as well as discuss some of the complexities we faced in the execution of this research. The first example is of Ayoub’s work on the European LGBT movement and utilizes a more structured type of triangulation in comparative research called a “nested analysis.” In terms of sequence, we use this example to highlight the processes that can inform mixed-method research: search for causal mechanisms in order to build theory, which can then be tested using a large-*n* research design, and then subsequently explore the causal processes in particular cases to understand what drives their correlations. Ayoub’s work is an example of multi-method research planned at the outset, meaning that he recognized the need for triangulation during the *design* and *data collection* phases of his research.

The second example, by Wallace and Zepeda-Millán, employs an explanatory sequential design that was “emergent,” meaning that the study was not initially designed to be mixed-method but became so as these authors realized their need to turn to qualitative data to further explain their findings (see Creswell and Clark 2011, 54). Because of the differential effects of the large versus small marches and potential differences in Spanish and English media consumption, they turned to Zepeda-Millán’s interview data on the role of the media in the protest wave to *interpret* their quantitative results.

The European LGBT Movement and Diffusion Dynamics

(Ayoub writing in the first person): Like many students of social movements, my initial interest in the LGBT rights movement was born from personal experience. The project dates back to 2004–06 when I was completing a master's degree in Berlin, at a time when countless Berliners were organizing to participate in marches for LGBT equality in various Polish cities. I came across a flyer concerning a march in Warsaw, sparking a long curiosity with the transnational nature of LGBT politics and the questions it raised. The political behavior that seemed obvious to many of the participants challenged fundamentals of what I had learned of politics in the classroom. What was rational about marching for rights in a foreign context, one in which such rights would not benefit you directly? Why did such activism meet forceful resistance in some cases and not in others? The uneven diffusion of legal rights and societal recognition across states—the goals of the movement—also puzzled me in light of previous scholarship that tracked the development of a European norm concerning LGBT rights, and another body of scholarship that cited human rights as the most uniformly adopted norms in the European Union (EU) accession process. The observations I encountered in these experiences, sparked my desire to understand the “whys” and “hows” of transnational LGBT activism, which eventually led to the triangular research design informing my dissertation (Ayoub 2013b) and book project.

QUESTIONS, CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND METHOD

I ultimately narrowed the research design around a tighter set of theoretically informed questions. Why, despite similar international pressures, has the social and legal recognition of minorities changed to such differing degrees and at such different rates across states? Under what domestic preconditions (of the recipient state) do international norms of sexual minority rights successfully spread? Is change due to heightened exposure to individuals and groups in states that have previously adopted the norm? To answer these questions, my dependent variables explored two consequences of norms: (1) compliance at the state level (the introduction of pro-LGBT legislation; and (2) at the level of internationalization (change in societal attitudes towards LGBT people)—there was ample variation on both measures of the dependent variable.

I limited the scope of the project to Europe, which offered a laboratory for testing and refining my theory, since the region houses both the EU norm of

protecting sexual minorities and the presence of states on both ends of the “gay friendliness” spectrum. Europe is the only world region where sexual minority rights are enshrined in binding international law (e.g., Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty), and various EU/European Council court rulings and non-binding resolutions have led some scholars to note the development of an LGBT norm at the international level. What remained unexplained, however, is the vast variation in how states responded to this norm (the dependent variable). Europe is also an ideal location to study the diffusion of norms because of the Cold War division. The 1960s sexual revolution and the 1980s HIV/AIDS epidemic politicized LGBT rights much earlier throughout several states in Western Europe. The issue came on the agenda much later on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, which had been relatively isolated from these influences.⁴ I thus developed a research design through which I sought to understand diffusion processes by exploring both the transnational actors and transnational channels that carry international LGBT rights norms, and the domestic structures that welcome or reject them.

In order to make certain generalizations while also understanding the mechanisms behind this complicated process, I followed the guidelines for multi-method research using a nested analysis technique, which began with the large-*n* statistical test of correlation between variables and then, depending on the results, proceeded to either “model-testing” or “model-building” small-*n* analysis” (Lieberman 2005, 436). While the method is originally explanatory sequential, it can, depending on whether the results converge, go back to an exploratory nature as a middle phase. As outlined by Lieberman (2005, 436), a multi-method nested design can take the following sequences:

Step 1: Preliminary large-*n* analysis to access the robustness of the model

Step 2: Small-*n* analysis is used to proceed to

- (a) explanatory model testing (if the findings in Step 1 are robust), using cases that fall on the regression line; *or*
- (b) exploratory model building (if the findings in Step 1 are not robust), using cases that fall both on and off the line.⁵

The project included large-*n* analyses that used statistical methods to test correlations between predictors in all EU member states and small-*n* analyses that used qualitative methods to trace channels of diffusion between carefully selected case studies. My description of the two steps that follow are thus informative of a triangular design in which the preliminary large-*n* analyses identified a set of ideal cases (on the regression line) for the small-*n* analysis (described under step two), which I used to test the theory and to understand the mechanisms by which ideas diffuse.⁶

Step 1: Quantitative Analyses

As is required in a nested-analysis design, I spent the first part of the project constructing the datasets for preliminary quantitative analyses. I needed to supplement existing datasets by adding variables directly related to my questions. Archival research uncovered data for all EU member and applicant states. In combination with existing data collection efforts by colleagues and LGBT organizations in the field,⁷ this research allowed me to code LGBT legislation across states and by year (1970–2010). It also allowed me to identify the presence of all LGBT organizations in Europe that had transnational ties. To do this, I used a combination of online and on-site archives at LGBT umbrella organizations during my preliminary fieldwork visits.

My original data collection, coupled with data derived from existing cross-national datasets containing information on levels of porousness to the international environment (KOF Index of Globalization⁸), democracy (Polity IV⁹), GDP measures (Penn World Table¹⁰), geographic proximity (Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics¹¹), and societal attitudes towards homosexuality (European Values Survey), resulted in two new datasets for quantitative analysis: an original Europe-wide dataset of five different categories of pro-LGBT legislation across states and time, and an international survey of attitudes towards LGBT people in European states. Table 4.1 is an example of a condensed version of a table describing some of the core data collected for the legislation dataset.

The second attitudinal dataset used several of these variables, combined with individual-level measures, including a variable measuring the geographic proximity (another transnational channel) of individuals' residences in EU-12 states to the former Iron Curtain.¹²

For the first step of the design, the data analysis compared the strength of the relationships among variables of diffusion across all EU member states (and the subsets of EU-12 and EU-15 states) using various statistical modeling techniques: ordered logistic and event history models for the legislation dataset, and multilevel random intercept iterative generalized least squares (IGLS) regression models for the attitudinal dataset. The statistical method assumes that data are derived from a representative sample (since the results are used to make inference about a broader population), that variables are independent of one another and are linearly related, and that error terms are homoskedastic, normally distributed, and uncorrelated (Maas and Hox 2004, 428).¹³ The appropriate modeling technique was selected, depending on each specific question and the structure of the data. In the analysis of attitudinal change, for example, the multilevel structure of the data and theory drove the selection of the IGLS method, which combines data at two analytical levels of respondents (individual-level) and states (group-level). Multilevel models are useful when the researcher believes that the individuals in his or her dataset

Table 4.1 LGBT Legislation Dataset (1970–2010), Key Dependent and Independent Variables Summarized

Concept	Hypothesized mechanism	Coding, notes, or examples
<i>Dependent variable</i>		
Combined legislation score		Combination of the following 5 categories:
– Anti-discrimination legislation		Employment, goods and services, constitution
– Criminal law refers to sexual orientation		Hate crimes based on sexual Orientation, an aggravating circumstance, and/or incitement to hatred prohibited
– Partnership recognition for same-sex couples		Cohabitation rights, registered partnership, marriage
– Parenting rights for same-sex couples		Joint adoption, second parent adoption, fertility treatment
– Sexual offenses provisions		Equal age of consent, same-sex sexual activity legal
<i>Select independent variables</i>		
<i>Transnational and international channels</i>		
Transnational LGBT organizations	Brokerage, framing	No. of domestic LGBT orgs with membership in transnational organization, by year
Social channels	Social learning	Information flows: Internet users (per 1,000 people), television (per 1,000 people) and trade in newspapers (percent of GDP) ^a
Political channels	Learning, sanctioning	Embassies in country, membership in international organizations, participation in UN Security Council missions, international treaties. ^a
Economic channels	Competition, sanctioning	Actual trade flows and restrictions (cf. KOF codebook) ^a
EU accession	Learning, sanctioning	Year state joined EU
Diffusion variables	Emulation	Yearly measure of the number of other states that have previously adopted a given policy
<i>Select domestic context variables</i>		
LGBT social spaces		0—Nothing going on; 1—Mention of some activity but not explicitly gay or lesbian; 2—Activity mentioned in one main city; 3—Some gay life in more than one city; 4—Gay social life in multiple cities; 5—Widespread gay social life ^b
Dominant religion		Protestant, mixed, Catholic, other
Level of democracy		Polity2 measure (cf. Polity IV codebook) ^c
Gross domestic product (log)		Real GDP per capita ^d

Note: Control variables not shown.

Sources: ^aKOF Index of Globalization; ^bSpartacus Travel Guides (Frank, Camp, and Boutcher 2010); ^cPolity IV dataset; ^dPenn GDP dataset.

are nested in unique groups that shape or mediate the outcome (Snijders and Bosker 1999, 43). The results of the statistical analyses, though surprising in some aspects, confirmed my intuitions regarding the strength of transnational channels of visibility on change in attitudes and legislation, leading to Step 2 (model testing).

Step 2: Qualitative Analyses

For the second step of the design, I turned to qualitative methods in order to confirm or question the validity of the correlations I observed in the large-n analysis. This component of the triangular design was used to answer open questions of causal order, measurement, and the heterogeneity of cases. It is important to note that in triangulation “the best use of [small-n analysis] is to leverage its distinct complementarities with [large-n analysis], not to try to implement it with the exact same procedures as one would carry out regression analysis” (Lieberman 2005, 440). In this sense, the small-n analyses also allowed me to observe the mechanisms (in my case, mechanisms of socialization) that connected the independent and dependent variables, aiding my understanding of historical sequence and causal process (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

In a most-different paired comparison (Przeworski and Teune 1970), I chose Poland and Slovenia. Among the aspects of the analyses in Step 1 that stood out was the positioning of these historically Catholic states on opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of legal standing and societal attitudes towards LGBT people among new EU member states.¹⁴ Both of these cases were well predicted by the large-n models and had variation on the explanatory and dependent variables. I also studied Germany and the EU as “norm entrepreneur” cases, since I identified them as sources of horizontal and vertical diffusion, respectively. These cases served as springboards for activism in Central and Eastern Europe. They illustrated how ideas moved from the EU and Germany to Poland and Slovenia, with activists using resources available to them in one context to mobilize in another (Ayoub 2013a).

As addressed in the section on the challenges of triangulation, selecting cases in this manner required thinking about feasibility and the time required to gather the skills necessary to conduct the analysis.¹⁵ Before starting my PhD coursework, I had BA and MA degrees in European politics that provided familiarity with the region and in-depth knowledge (language and history) on a few specific cases. There were other representative cases that—like Germany—contained activists supporting LGBT activism outside their borders. I chose Germany because of my fluency in German and because of the state’s geographic location to the new EU member states, making it a sound choice for study, both in terms of theory and *feasibility*. I also had enough preliminary large-n data results to anticipate the positioning of the Polish case early on, and started studying the Polish language (2008–11) at the beginning of my PhD training. This was enabled in large part through three Foreign Language and Area Studies grants on Polish language and history. I did not, however, have the time or resources to learn Slovenian. Fortunately, the *transnational* LGBT activists I was interested in usually worked in English (and sometimes German). There were, however, occasions where I had to have an

interpreter accompany me to interviews, which generated additional financial burdens.

Alongside some archival research of movement documents, most of the data for the qualitative analysis in Step 2 was derived from two methods:

- 82 *Semi-structured interviews* with domestic and transnational LGBT advocates, policymakers (EU and domestic), and movement opponents;¹⁶
- *Participant observation* at strategic activist meetings and conferences, and political demonstrations and marches for and against LGBT Rights.

To conduct this research, I spent a total of 25 months in the field, beginning with two preliminarily research trips in 2008 and 2009, followed by the extensive research stay between the summers of 2010 and 2012.

Most interviews—ranging between 45 minutes and four hours—were with organizers at LGBT rights advocacy groups and policymakers who work on the issue at hand. These interviews investigated several questions falling under the central research problem I was analyzing. For example concerning the transnational ties between actors and the types of local obstacles that they face. Do domestic LGBT organizations focus on instigating change through their national governments, or do they look to Brussels to influence change from above; and what percentage of their initiatives focus on each level? How much do actors rely on external aid and expertise? What are the various state responses to activism? Among which segments of society does resistance to LGBT rights originate? These questions, only roughly presented here, shed light on the conditions that have led to divergent outcomes across the cases. The interviews also helped me to understand the causal processes. To deal with potential endogeneity concerns in the large-*n*, I asked several questions geared towards understanding the sequencing of external support, in relation to domestic activism and change. I selected and interviewed organizers from the universe of transnational LGBT rights organizations.¹⁷ Then, using snowball-sampling techniques, I was able to identify a sample of opposition groups and individual policymakers who opposed the introduction of LGBT rights norms, whom I approached for further interviews. The purpose of this set of interviews was to observe the strategies and rationales underlying the opposition towards liberalization and to supplement the information I obtained from LGBT rights groups.

Participant observation also helped me understand the strategies and inner workings of the movement. It centered around two types of events. First, I attended LGBT strategic activist meetings and conferences, including the 2010 and 2011 ILGA-Europe Annual Meetings, the 2011 Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe meeting, the 2010 EuroPride Warsaw conference, a 2013 US State Department international meeting on transgender rights, and several activist workshops. Issues covered at these meetings

included the tactics behind transnational LGBT activism in Europe, comprising strategic litigation, organizing demonstrations, and creating synergy in transnational cooperation. Participant observation also informed my analysis by allowing me to listen to and interact with various representatives from states where I did not schedule formal interviews, thereby providing additional valuable information to contextualize the findings of the large-n analysis. Second, I invested time in attending numerous political demonstrations, parades, and marches, both by proponents and opponents of LGBT rights. These included events that targeted their own states and those that drew attention to LGBT repression in foreign states.

Finally, in an additional step towards the end of my fieldwork, I conducted an original online expert survey of the 291 transnational LGBT organizations in Europe. This was not originally planned, but the large-n data collection had produced a rich dataset that identified these organizations, as well as the contact information for the organizational leadership. I wanted to further crosscheck my interviews by additionally collecting representative data that I could use to support the claims I was making based on the statistical and interview data. I thus asked a series of 20 questions—related to my interview questions—to get answers, from which I was able to produce descriptive statistics that showed how the responses of activists compared across the region. This provided a unique opportunity to visualize several important issues related to my research problem, such as the perceived long-term success of the anti-LGBT resistance in various national contexts, or the effect of external resources on domestic socio-legal outcomes.

Taken together, the triangular large-n and small-n research design used in this example followed a pragmatic, problem-driven approach to scholarship, in which the pursuit of understanding complex realities drives the selection of methods (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). By explicating multiple methods of comparative research, the data are crosschecked using numerous sources to increase the robustness of the findings. The quantitative analysis illuminated the general trends I observed in the diffusion of LGBT rights. Next, the qualitative analysis helped me test the model and explain the mechanisms of diffusion. Combined, I am confident that the various methods I employed shed new light on the processes behind the diffusion of and resistance to LGBT rights norms in various domestic contexts.

United States Immigrant Rights Activism

(Wallace and Zepeda-Millán writing): Our initial interests in social movements and, more specifically, the US immigrant rights movement was also

rooted in personal experiences, as we both come from immigrant families and were involved in immigrant rights activism. Our collaboration using triangulation has resulted in several article-length manuscripts, in addition to a larger ongoing book project. However, here we will focus on one primary example that combines survey and spatial data with interview data (Wallace et al. 2014).

QUESTIONS, CONCEPTUALIZATION, AND METHOD

The primary research questions in our work ask what are the temporal, spatial, and magnitude effects of protests on Latino political attitudes, representation, and identity. At the outset of the project we had not predetermined which research methods would be utilized or that the study would be mixed-methods. Rather, through the research process, it became apparent that we would need to utilize an emergent sequential design because of issues that arose in the quantitative analysis. As previously explained, “emergent mixed methods designs generally occur when a second approach (quantitative or qualitative) is added after the study is underway because one method is found to be inadequate” (Creswell and Clark 2011, 54). Following Creswell and Clark’s (2011) explanatory design procedures, we first conducted the quantitative analysis in phase one, and then identified specific quantitative results that we wanted to explain more specifically in the second phase.

The data for this project was collected over two primary phases: a quantitative phase with survey data and a qualitative phase with interview data that was directly informed by the results of the first phase. Additionally the timing between stages was significant. Before and during the 2006 immigrant protest wave, Zepeda-Millán constructed a list from movement websites of where local immigrant rights demonstrations were being planned. After the protest wave began, he then reviewed newspaper articles online to confirm that these local protests had actually occurred, and to add locations that were reported as having marches but were not on his initial list of planned demonstrations. During the execution of his dissertation research, Zepeda-Millán conducted over 125 interviews with immigrant rights activists in the West Coast, East Coast, and Southern United States. His interview instrument included questions regarding organizing tactics and strategies, coalitions, goals, motivations for participation, and the role of the Spanish- and English-language media in the mobilization process. This qualitative data would prove to be extremely useful in future work with Wallace, as it was later used to help develop the theory and explain our statistical findings in our article on the effects of protests on Latino attitudes towards government (Wallace et al. 2014).

Zepeda-Millán's original dataset contained a date, estimate of number of participants, and the protest location city and state. Near the completion of our dissertations, we began to expand the number of observations in Zepeda-Millán's initial dataset. In our Wallace et al. 2014 article (co-written with Michael Jones-Correa) using this data, we sought to analyze the impact of spatial, temporal, and magnitude components of the 2006 immigrant rights protest wave on attitudes towards government by combining our newly created *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset* with the 2006 Latino National Survey (LNS). We combined the quantitative data with qualitative interview data to build the theory and explain interesting quantitative results more fully. This was an appropriate design for our project because our goals were to "assess trends and relationships with quantitative data but also be able to explain the mechanism or reasons behind the resultant trends," as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2011) when choosing an explanatory design (p. 82). The research design exemplifies what Creswell and Clark (2011) identify as one of the main strengths of the explanatory sequential designs: it allowed us to design the second phase "based on what is learned from the initial quantitative phase" (p. 83).

Step 1: Quantitative Analysis

The first phase consisted of survey data that we merged with our protest data set along with newly created temporal and spatial measures. The LNS was conducted in 17 states between November 2005 and August 2006. Interviews were conducted by phone and respondents were given the option to take the survey in Spanish or English. The instrument contained over 160 survey items. The LNS survey instrument contained an exact date of interview in the general data. Critically, this information allowed us to measure respondents' distance to protests in terms of time and space. One distinct advantage of our analysis over other work examining social movements and political attitudes is that the LNS was in the field before, during, and after the protest cycle. This allowed us to assess how the protests impacted political attitudes over the course of the protest wave.

Our *2006 Immigrant Protest-Event Dataset* also built on a previous collection of the 2006 protest events (Bada et al. 2006) by substantially expanding the number of protest observations and the specific information regarding each demonstration. To be confident in the validity of our dataset, we utilized newspaper archives to find at least one article to substantiate the details of each protest observation (both in the Bada et al. dataset and our own original dataset). For each protest event, we also identified the specific geographical street address, city, zip code, and state information, as well as the number of participants and the date of the event. In all, we verified and collected data on a total of 357 immigrant protest events that took place in 2006.¹⁸

The first protest in our new dataset occurred on February 14, 2006, and the final series of demonstrations culminated on May 1, 2006. The protests were widely dispersed across the country, taking place in both urban and rural places. Figure 4.1 maps the geographic locations of the protests, with the size of the circles reflecting the number of participants. Figure 4.2 depicts the distribution of the protest cycle in terms of both the number of protests and the number of participants.

To examine the effects of protests on political attitudes, we merged the LNS and the protest dataset to calculate the distance between respondents and the demonstration using GIS. We used the address information of LNS respondents to calculate their exact distance to every protest location. This level of specificity in the space measures was a significant strength of this project because it allowed us to precisely assess the impact of proximity of the protest events on respondents' political attitudes. The raw distance measures for each respondent were then used to create summary measures to capture time, space, and magnitude—that is, the timing of the protest event, its distance from each respondent, and the size of the event. The first measure, *Large Protest*, captures whether a large protest with over 10,000 participants occurred before the date of interview of the respondent and within 100 miles of their address. The second, *Number of Small Protests*, counted the number of protests, which were under 10,000 participants in size, occurring in the 30 days preceding each respondent's interview within a 100-mile radius. Since our theory hinged on the difference between the effects of large versus small protests because of possible differences in messages received, it was necessary to have two protest measures that categorized exposure to protests in this manner. These two measures of respondents' spatial and temporal proximity to protest events captured respondents' relative exposure to protests and were central to our statistical analysis. The results of the statistical models indicated that the number of small protests near respondents had a strong impact on their positive attitudes towards government. Second, and somewhat counter-intuitively, we found that large protests were correlated with *lower* feelings of efficacy.

Step 2: Qualitative Analysis

To make sense of these findings, the second phase of the analysis is the “interface for mixing” of the methods, where the quantitative analysis directly informs the qualitative portion of the project (Creswell and Clark 2011, 83). Because English-language media consumption was significant in most of our models and we found different effects for large versus small protests, we wanted to explore the quantitative results using qualitative data and analysis. To do so, we turned to Zepeda-Millán's interviews, which had information about the role of the media in the mobilization process throughout the country. The interview

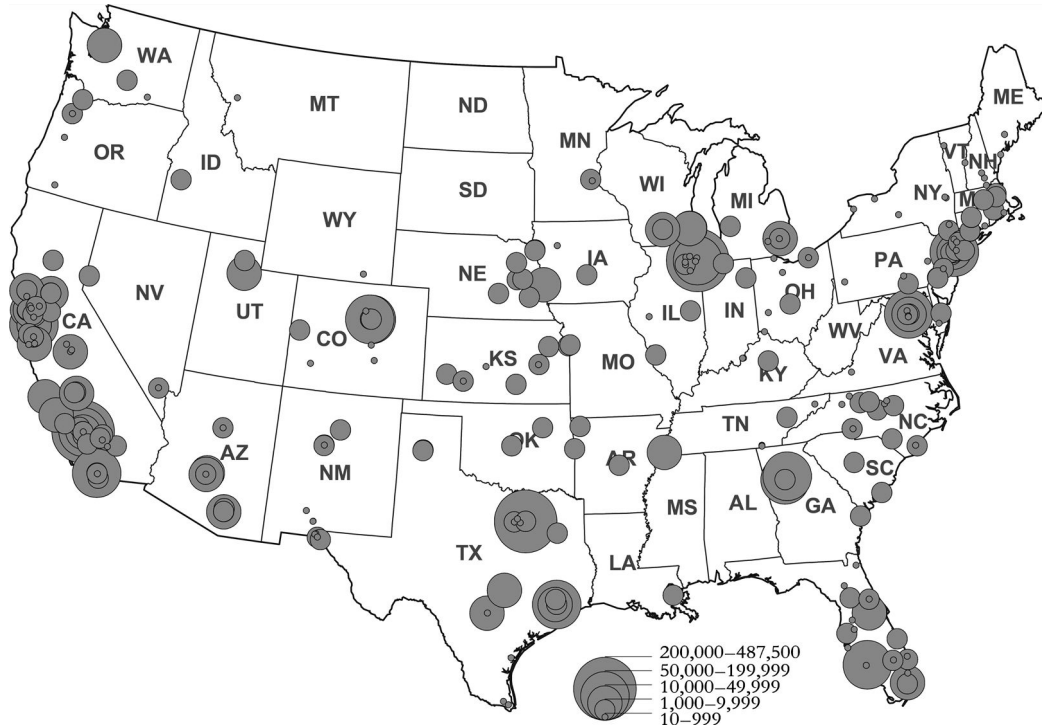


Figure 4.1 Immigrant Rights Marches by Location and Number of Participants During Spring 2006

Source: Wallace, Sophia J. Chris Zepeda-Millán, and Michael Jones-Correa 2014. "Spatial and Temporal Proximity: Examining the Effects of Protests on Political Attitudes," *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 433–48.

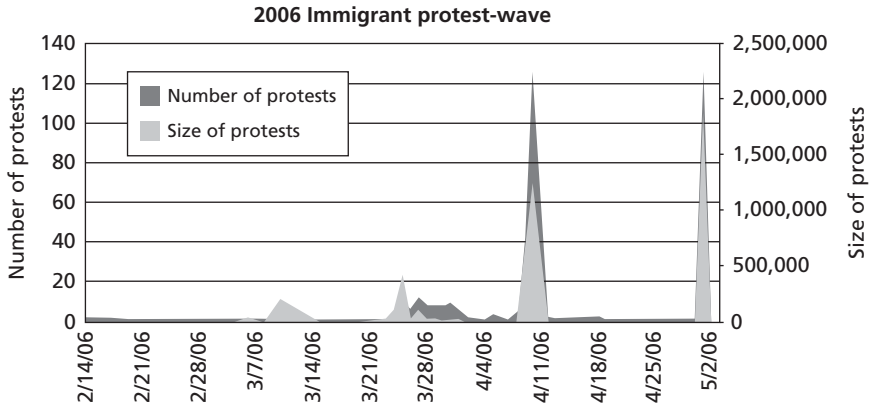


Figure 4.2 Number and Size of Protests Over the Immigrant Rights Protest-Wave

Source: Wallace, Sophia J. Chris Zepeda-Millán, and Michael Jones-Correa 2014. "Spatial and Temporal Proximity: Examining the Effects of Protests on Political Attitudes," *American Journal of Political Science* 58(2): 433–48.

data became essential in explaining the quantitative results. Without it, we would have only been able to guess at possible explanations for our statistical findings. Instead, we were able to flesh out the findings with the interview data to construct a strong theoretical explanation for our results.

The results from our analysis of this qualitative data suggested that a possible reason for the differing impacts of the protest measures may be explained by the contrasting movement frames people were exposed to by small versus large protests. The interview data indicated that via the mass media, Latinos in locations with big protests were likely exposed to not just the patriotic messaging of the mainstream movement, but also to the anti-systemic frames of radical activists. This exposure to a counter-narrative of the marches (intra-movement frame disputes) may have made Latinos more skeptical of government and their ability to achieve change through mainstream politics. In contrast, Latinos exposed to frequent smaller protests were more likely to adopt a more optimistic view of government because a more unified "pro-America" master frame dominated in these locales. Our qualitative data also suggested another possible factor in explaining our results. Interviews with protest organizers indicated that English-language media consumption of Latinos being correlated with more negative views of government could be because English news outlets were often much more critical of the protests (from highlighting divisions in the movement to accusing the marchers of being unpatriotic). Thus, our findings showed that Latinos who had higher levels of English-language media consumption displayed higher levels of political alienation, which was perhaps the result of biased media coverage by English news outlets.

While we found this research design to ultimately prove very beneficial in exploring the relationship between protests and attitudes towards government, the two-phase design implemented here does take considerable time to conduct. In our case, the data was collected over several years, in part due to the nature of the phenomenon being measured (a protest wave that occurred during the spring of 2006), but also due to the number of different types of quantitative and qualitative data necessary to conduct the research project. Yet despite this challenge, we contend that for our specific research questions, the adoption of a mixed-methods research design was critical in fully explaining the phenomenon at hand. The qualitative phase of the project was critical to executing the research project and was necessary to explain the quantitative data, which is a key attribute of exploratory designs (Creswell and Clark 2011, 83).

Because we did not fully explore the media-variable findings in Wallace et al. 2014, we have adopted an emergent and exploratory research design for our subsequent work in this area beyond the example we have discussed at length in this chapter. In response to our initial findings, we decided to pursue future research projects in this area to continue exploring important mechanisms. For example, in conjunction with a team of research assistants, we collected newspaper articles on the protests in both national and local newspapers in areas where a large number of protests had occurred and/or where interviews with activists had taken place. Our intent is to use this collection of media sources to conduct both qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the themes, language, and frequency of coverage and combine this data with the larger quantitative data set.

In addition, during her dissertation, Wallace collected quantitative data on immigration legislation in the US Congress and legislative behavior of representatives across a variety of types of activity that occurred during the congressional session that encompassed the 2006 protest wave. At the time, her intent was to use the data primarily to explain how the race and ethnicity of members of Congress, alongside district racial and ethnic demographics, played a role in legislative behavior, which was the focus of her dissertation. Subsequently, she is using this data in combination with both qualitative interview data from Zepeda-Millán, and the expanded quantitative protest data set constructed by her and Zepeda-Millán, to examine the effect of the 2006 immigrant rights protests in congressional districts on the specific representative's legislative behavior of that district and those in adjoining districts. This is yet another way in which the two researchers have combined their methodological skills and data to create mixed-methods projects. These additional examples are beyond the focus of our primary example; however, they exemplify how mixed-methods approaches can be utilized to continue to build and expand on the original study.

Strategies for Publishing Triangulation Research

After the analysis is complete, another area of difficulty facing researchers employing triangulation concerns publication. First, combining different types of data and utilizing a mixed-methods approach in cohesive manuscripts for publication that conform to journal article length requirements is challenging. Over time, academic peer-reviewed journals in political science have increasingly moved towards shorter and shorter page or word allocations. For example, the *American Journal of Political Science* has a strict word limit of 8,500 words that includes all tables, figures, and footnotes.¹⁹ *The Journal of Politics* has a page limit of 35 pages inclusive of all tables, figures, and references.²⁰ In contrast, many outlets in sociology are much more lenient on these issues. For example, the *American Journal of Sociology* does not have a formal word limit but discourages papers over 10,000 words, the *American Sociological Review* has a more generous limit of 15,000 words, and *Mobilization* allows submissions of 40 pages, not including tables and figures. Other interdisciplinary journal outlets, such as the *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Studies*, have a word limit of 8,000 words, possibly indicating that movement towards shorter manuscripts may become more common across all disciplines.

The shorter word/page limits pose serious challenges for researchers engaged in triangulation because they must describe and explain all of their sources of data and findings in detail. Unlike those who utilize a single method, mixed-method studies necessitate more prose to fulfill the basic requirements of a sound research manuscript. Nonetheless, both types of studies (single and mixed-method) must conform to the same word/page limits. Qualitative scholars are already familiar with this dilemma, particularly those who use interviews and focus groups due to the incorporation of quotations from participants. Thus, mixed-methods researchers using multiple types of qualitative data or quantitative data face a doubly challenging task of conforming to journal article length limits.

One practical solution to short page allocations, while likely not ideal for authors in terms of how they might envision their work in its most cohesive form, is to create an additional supplementary appendix. While traditionally viewed as a place to document additional statistical tests and tables, an appendix can be used to further explain issues and complexity in the data or to provide additional description of case studies, interviews, or operationalization of concepts and variables. In some of our own works, all of the authors here have had to add appendices that contained a supplemental discussion of measurement issues, along with tables of additional statistical analyses to convince reviewers of the robustness of their research design and findings.

Since reviewers often asked for some of this information anyway, they found this useful as a solution to work around the journal's word/page limit.

This brings us to another serious challenge that mixed-methods researchers face during the publication process, which is bias towards one method and hostility towards others by both reviewers and journals. This is by no means widespread in every journal, since many newer journals such as the *European Political Science Review* and *Politics, Groups, and Identities (PGI)*, embrace methodological pluralism as a direct result of discord over methodologies that erupted in the 1990s and early 2000s. Outlets such as the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* are explicitly aimed at publishing articles focused on the methodology of mixed methods. Additionally, other established journals, such as *Mobilization* or *International Migration Review*, are explicitly interdisciplinary and welcome methodological pluralism as well. However, certain outlets in political science have been slower to change or have become increasingly restrictive to favor quantitative work, and sometimes eschew mixed-methods work. Scholars using triangulation herald the analytical benefits of engaging multiple types of data; however, it is not uncommon for single-method scholars to be hostile to "rival" modes of data collection and analysis. For instance, there may be scholars who are wedded to regression or experiments and, consequently, become skeptical of all research that does not employ these methodological approaches. Encountering at least one reviewer of this type is likely in a set of three or more reviewers, which can lead to a set of mixed reviews, where some reviewers support the use of mixed methods while others dislike it.

This is problematic for scholars of triangulation because by definition their work employs multiple methods and often crosses the quantitative versus qualitative divide. One reviewer may respond critically by asking authors to remove sections of the paper—or ask for an entire overhaul of the research design—to eliminate the method to which they object, while another praises it. Worse yet, a reviewer may reject the work on the basis of the use of multiple methods or employing one that the reviewer views negatively. Similarly, some editors may still demonstrate the same bias, rejecting work for publication that does not seem to fit their journal in terms of methodology, or rejecting work when faced with reviews offering conflicting views. Practically, authors can address these issues in several ways. Since scholars who use triangulation are problem-driven and not methods-driven, like many of the potential negative reviewers and editors, authors must take great care to address methodological concerns, but not alter their research design in an attempt to please these types of reviewers.

First, authors must foresee that some reviewers may be skeptical of multiple methods and in particular the collection of a considerable amount of new data that is "less tested" than known datasets. With this in mind, authors can dedicate space in both the main body of the manuscript and in

a supplementary appendix to provide extensive detail regarding the methods, measurements, concepts, and variables employed and utilized. Second, authors should also take care to demonstrate additional testing and address potential methodological concerns, both in text and in footnotes.

Third, authors can carefully select journals for submission based on the types of work that have been published in them, the current editorial team, and respective methodological philosophies. Some journals may demonstrate a low frequency of publishing mixed-methods research; however, they may be receptive to a paper if the findings are particularly strong, counter-intuitive, address an important and timely topic, or employ at least one methodology or type of data that is acutely attractive to the current editorial team. Authors must reflect on these questions honestly prior to submission due to the reality of publication bias against certain types of methodology and areas of inquiry, especially in light of increasing lag times in publication. Authors can review past journal issues to examine published work in addition to using networks of senior scholars who are aware of the reputations of individuals, editorial teams, and journals, and their respective philosophies on these issues. Similarly, the strategic use of reviewer requests to specifically disallow an individual from reviewing the manuscript can be an important tool in limiting access to a likely substantive reviewer who possesses a methodological bias against mixed-methods work. The challenges outlined here facing scholars employing triangulation are not meant to discourage authors, but rather to provide practical tips in the execution of such research in design, analysis, and ultimately publication.

Conclusion: A Case for Triangulation

Social movements are dynamic affairs in which the most effective activists carefully choose the tools and tactics that fit the strategies they believe will best help them achieve their goals. Movement practitioners plan, act (or react), reflect, and adapt to both expected and unforeseen challenges they encounter as they try to reach their aims. The argument we have attempted to advance in this chapter is that, in many respects, social movement scholars must do the same in our research endeavors. If our objective is to better understand the complex and constantly changing nature of the phenomena we study—contentious politics—then the questions we ask should not be limited by methodological constraints. We must be willing to use and learn multiple ways of collecting the various types of data often required to answer the multifaceted questions we investigate. Our view stems from our own research experiences, which have demonstrated that the answers to the problems we explored would have been incomplete, had we stopped at their respective quantitative or qualitative components.

Drawing examples from our own work on transnational LGBT rights activism in Europe and immigrant rights activism in the United States, we humbly contend that our research illustrates how the use of triangulation can help us both theoretically and empirically understand dynamic and often-neglected areas of social movement research. Although a division in the kinds of data and methodological strategies used is effective in producing scholars with sound expertise in one area, a sharp divide can also limit the questions one asks. Scholars have multiple tools and models at their disposal (Small 2011, 77). Accordingly, by either solely or jointly attempting to use multiple data sources and collection methods to answer different aspects of vital questions, we students of social movements should push ourselves to be as innovative, flexible, and resourceful as the activists we study.

■ NOTES

1. According to Gaddis (1996, 33), reaching for “science” is a curious goal that reflects nothing more than a bad case of “physics envy.”
2. (1) Cases where x (economic development) leads to y (democracy) in some cases but does not have this effect in others, where y is caused by w . (2) Cases where x (social demographic governance) is associated with an increase in y (social spending) at one point in time, but not in another. (3) Increase in x (protest) causes y (government turnover) in some cases but an entirely different outcome (repression) in other cases. (4) Cases where y depends on all v , w , and x (whose values are in turn jointly dependent on each other). (5) Cases with endogenous phenomena, where y leads to x , and x leads to y (Hall 2003, 381).
3. The fundamental aspect of comparison is control: the ability to remove alternative explanations. As one moves up the ladder of abstraction *s/he* loses control, which narrows the question.
4. Within the EU-27, the large- n analyses thus also included two subgroups as a heuristic device to think of diffusion: the new EU-12 member states (2004 and 2007 waves) and the older EU-15 states.
5. In this example, it was not necessary to revert to this model-building step. Refer to Lieberman (2005) for helpful suggestions if this is necessary.
6. This is a good way to deal with the problem of selection bias. Geddes (1990) discusses the danger of selecting on the dependent variable, which can introduce systematic error (for a response to Geddes that is intended for the qualitative researcher, see Collier and Mahoney 1996).
7. For example, the work of Kees Waaldijk (2009) and ILGA-Europe on the status of LGBT legislation.
8. See <<http://globalization.kof.ethz.ch/>> for data (accessed March 21, 2014) (Dreher, Gaston, and Martens 2008).
9. See <<http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm>> for data (accessed March 21, 2014) (Marshall, Jagers, and Gurr 2010).
10. See <http://pwt.econ.upenn.edu/php_site/pwt_index.php> for data (accessed March 21, 2014) (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2011).
11. See Eurostat 2011, <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/introduction> (accessed March 21, 2014).

12. To construct this measure, I corresponded the regional variable (x048) associated with each respondent's address in the European Values Survey dataset with the regions with Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics (NUTS) data.
13. Diagnostics tests included correlations between predictors and variance inflation factors (for multicollinearity); residual plots, the Breusch Pagan and the White's Test (for heteroskedasticity); LOESS regression plots, Ramsey's Regression Specification Error Test, and Extreme Bounds Analysis (for model specification); and calculating hat values, internally and externally studentized residuals, and accessing DFITS, DFBETA, and COVRATIO results (for leverage, outliers, and influential data points) (for a basic example on model selection and diagnostics, see Ayoub 2010, 470 footnote 8).
14. Consistent with case selection guidelines, I have variation on the dependent variable (Geddes 1990; Collier and Mahoney 1996). The Polish experience stood in contrast to that of Slovenia, as Slovenian social attitudes have changed at a remarkably accelerated pace. While there have been few legal changes in Poland, Slovenia—along with the Czech Republic—also extends the most far-reaching LGBT rights laws among the EU-12, including protections that surpass those of many older member states.
15. I took eight courses in methodology and language at Cornell (including a course in "Methods for Field Research"). Outside of Cornell, I sought out specialized quantitative and qualitative training by attending the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research's (ICPSR) and the IQMR. In 2008, I participated in a workshop hosted by the Institute for Human Social Sciences that focused on Polish identity and culture. I also spent summers complementing my language courses with intensive summer immersion programs.
16. While the bulk of the qualitative research focused on my case studies (Germany, Poland, Slovenia, and the European institutions), I also interviewed actors from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, and Turkey. The additional interviews were used to yield contextual information. Some were complementary cases, in which I wanted to see that the processes related to those in Poland and Slovenia were occurring; others were outlier cases that were off the regression line and needed further contextualization.
17. I followed a strategy of first e-mailing potential interviewees. If I did not receive a response after a second reminder e-mail, I followed up by telephoning them or visiting their organizations. Often personal interaction was more likely to yield an interview than an e-mail.
18. Our protest data includes 106 more events than the earlier Bada et al. (2006) table of protest events. Similar to Bada et al., our dataset does not include counter-(anti-immigrant) protests which might have taken place at the time.
19. <<http://ajps.org/guidelines-for-manuscripts/>> (accessed March 21, 2014).
20. <<http://www.journalofpolitics.org/instructions-to-authors>> (accessed March 21, 2014).

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5 Comparative Historical Analysis

Daniel P. Ritter

Comparative historical analysis (CHA) is one of the social sciences' oldest methods (Haupt 2007, 698; Skocpol and Somers 1980, 174). Similar to case-oriented comparative methods (Ragin 1987, 34) and closely related to historical institutionalism (Steinmo 2008), CHA enjoys “a long and distinguished history” in the service of social scientists like Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Alexis de Tocqueville, Otto Hintze, and Max Weber, to name a few early pioneers (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 3). Although the method has been refined since its early years (Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu 2009)—rapidly so in the past few decades—many of its fundamental strengths, but also some of its weaknesses, remain (Ragin 1987, 42–4, 48–51).

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. I first briefly introduce CHA, its logic, and its central concepts; but since this has been done at length by others (see especially Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003b), the main task of this chapter, in line with the objective of the book, is to offer a hands-on, practical guide to how CHA may be applied by social movement researchers. It is important to note at the offset that, in contrast to most of the other methods presented in this volume, many scholars using CHA view it as a “research approach rather than a single overarching theory or technique of data collection or analysis” (Skocpol 2003, 419). As a consequence, comparative historical analysts have been less confined by agreed-upon methodological practices than are most social scientists.¹ While this has resulted in extended theoretical discussions about methodological issues, research practices have often been overlooked. As a result, we know a lot about what CHA is, but less about how it is done. My hope is therefore that this chapter will offer students interested in CHA some suggestions about how one might practically employ the method.

What is Comparative Historical Analysis?

According to one of its leading practitioners, “the overriding intent [of CHA] is to develop, test, and refine causal, explanatory hypotheses about events

or structures integral to macro-units such as nation-states” (Skocpol 1979, 36). Although this brief mission statement captures the main characteristics of CHA, further clarification can be provided by the three words that constitute the method’s name: comparative, historical, and analysis (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 10–13). Combined, these components provide the foundation of a research approach centered on historically contextualized causal relationships within a comparative framework.

The first distinguishing quality of CHA is its *analytical* emphasis on causal relationships. Rather than searching for correlations between variables, CHA seeks to unearth the mechanisms that tie hypothesized causes and outcomes together. The emphasis on causality is coupled with a preoccupation with “big questions—that is, questions about large-scale outcomes that are regarded as substantively and normatively important by both specialists and nonspecialists” (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 7). This means that scholars employing CHA tend to focus their attention on the causes of macro-level phenomena, such as revolutions (Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991; Wickham-Crowley 1992; Selbin 1999; Goodwin 2001; Foran 2005), state formation (Tilly 1990; Young 1994; Ekiert 1996), national economic development (Evans 1995; Roy 1997; Adams 2005), racial and ethnic relations (Brubaker 1992; Calhoun 1997), the emergence of women’s rights (O’Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Charrad 2001), as well as the factors that explain the rise of democracy and authoritarianism (Moore 1966; Wood 2000). Fascinated as they are by the big (not to say huge) picture, comparative historical analysts tend to seek answers to questions like “What are the causes of revolutions?” rather than try to describe the day-to-day activities and strategies of revolutionary movements. Such micro-descriptions may be part of the study’s historical narrative, but they rarely constitute its theoretical focus.

Second, CHA is concerned with systematic *comparisons* of relatively few cases. While it can certainly be argued that social scientific research is always, in one way or another, comparative in nature (Swanson 1971, 145; Lieberman 1985, 44), CHA employs a specific type of comparisons, namely that of large social units. While most comparative historical studies have focused on nation-states, there is no prerequisite that countries must constitute the unit of analysis. Supranational territories, federated states, cities, and even cultural communities can and have been used as the bases for comparative historical projects, although the nation-state has by far been the most popular one (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 14). The attention to macro-units of analysis follows logically from the method’s focus on big questions, as macro-phenomena tend to occur on the macro-level of society.

Comparative historical analyses necessarily deal with only a limited number of cases. In some social scientific circles this constitutes a major limitation, since generalizations to broad case universes are impossible on the bases of “small-n” samples. Put plainly, how could one purport to explain the general

causes of revolution by examining three cases thereof? Criticisms like these are based on a different—and today dominant—understanding of social science, namely that quantitative analyses of large datasets are the best and most reliable paths to knowledge. Meanwhile, CHA operates according to a different logic: since the number of observations of the macro-phenomenon under investigation may be small to begin with, statistical analysis is unlikely to be a viable alternative. There may simply not exist enough revolutions or state formations to create a database with sufficient variation that can then be analyzed with statistical software. Furthermore, and perhaps even more importantly, the emphasis on causal relationships makes quantitative methods a less than ideal method with which to answer the types of questions asked by comparative historical researchers. Since the objective is to establish causal chains rather than correlations between variables, quantitative analysis is ill suited for the types of research questions CHA scholars tend to ask (Hall 2003; McKeown 2004).

Finally, CHA assumes that the relevant causal factors to be identified are somehow rooted in, and influenced by, *historical trajectories*. Causal explanations are therefore to be uncovered through close attention to long-term processes. Unlike many other methods, CHA is not content to compare its units of analysis at a given historical point in time. Instead, the approach requires explanations to be presented in the shape of historically contextualized narratives that explicitly trace the emergence of the phenomenon at hand. To accomplish this task, techniques and concepts like process tracing and path dependence are employed to uncover the link between cause and effect in a “genetic” (Nagel 1961) fashion, that is, through the “reconstruction of the origin of a certain event” (della Porta 2008, 206). This practice is based on the recognition that the types of questions CHA scholars often engage cannot be understood as simple relationships between two variables. Although it might seem evident that economic despair is a central cause of revolutions (which it may or may not be), the researcher should, in order to present a plausible argument, show *how* economic hardship leads to revolution. Does economic despair alienate the lower classes? Does it improve the middle class’s ability to mobilize against the state? Does it result in elite defections? Is it a combination of these factors? Whatever the hypothesized answer might be, CHA requires practitioners to identify the casual mechanism through which economic despair leads to revolution.

Despite its lofty causal objectives, comparative historical analysis is nonetheless a modest research approach. Unlike quantitative research, CHA does not seek to propose general statements about social phenomenon (Ragin 1987, 12–13). Scholars generally avoid theorizing about *all* revolutions or *all* state formations, since an appreciation of the importance and variability of historical contexts leads CHA researchers to conclude that such universality is unlikely to exist: it seems improbable that one distinct set of conditions would cause revolutions both in eighteenth-century France and twentieth-century Nicaragua. Thus, rather than strive for universal generalizability, comparative

historical researchers delineate their studies thematically, temporally, and/or geographically to only include cases that can reasonably be grouped together. To this end, researchers often construct theoretically sound subsets of a given phenomenon and then seek to theorize about the few cases that fall within that category. For example, Skocpol (1979) limited her study to social revolutions occurring in agrarian bureaucracies, thus qualifying both the type of revolution she had in mind and the political context in which the revolutions occurred. Similarly, both Goodwin (2001) and Foran (2005) avoid broad generalization by dividing their cases of revolutions into various subgroups.

THE LOGIC OF COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

In order to establish causal relationships between dependent and independent variables, comparative historical analysis employs a logic similar to the one driving quantitative research (della Porta 2002, 291). In this effort, researchers can base their endeavor on one of two broad methods, both of which were formalized by John Stuart Mill (1974). The first, which Mill called the “method of agreement,” requires the researcher “to establish that several cases having in common the phenomenon to be explained also have in common the hypothesized causal factors, although the cases vary in other ways that might have seemed relevant” (Skocpol and Somers 1980, 183). The second, the “method of difference,” instead “contrast cases in which the phenomenon to be explained and the hypothesized causes are present to other (‘negative’) cases in which the phenomenon and the causes are both absent, although they are as similar as possible to the ‘positive’ cases in other respects” (Skocpol and Somers 1980, 183). Table 5.1 contrasts Mill’s two comparative methods, where *y* represents the dependent variable and all other letters represent independent variables.

The presence of variance in the dependent variable in the method of difference is the major divergence between the two methods and makes the method of difference similar to quantitative analysis, which demands such variance.

Table 5.1 The Method of Agreement and the Method of Difference

Method of agreement			Method of difference	
Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Positive case(s)	Negative case(s)
a	d	g	a	a
b	e	h	b	b
c	f	i	c	c
x	x	x	x	not x
y	y	y	y	not y

Source: Adapted from Skocpol and Somers 1980, 184.

Since a solid theoretical argument must ultimately be able to explain both the occurrence and the absence of a particular phenomenon, the method of difference is often considered to be more powerful than the method of agreement. As a consequence, comparative historical scholars often include negative cases in their research designs in order to bolster their models' explanatory power.

An inherent problem with the comparative method as envisioned by Mill is that it does not allow for multiple and conjunctural causation; that is, the possibility that either 1) more than one causal path to a certain outcome exists; or 2) that a set of causes *combine* to bring out the outcome (Ragin 1987, 42–4). Fortunately, CHA's absence of a generalizability objective means that these limitations are not overly problematic as long as the researcher defines the phenomenon of interest precisely. For example, Tilly (1984, 80–81) tackled this issue by identifying four “ways of seeing” historicized comparisons, each one suited to different types of cases and phenomena. It should also be emphasized that contemporary CHA scholarship is influenced, rather than dictated by, Mill's comparative methods. Today, few scholars constrain themselves to the methods of agreement and difference, and instead prefer to use them as guiding logics in their work. Recognizing that the potential number of explanations far exceeds the researcher's ability to confront each one of them, few comparative historical analysts accept the deterministic logic of Mill's method as their own. Instead, the methods of agreement and difference are approached as ideal types, since it is unlikely that all cases examined through the method of agreement are dissimilar on all important factors except one, or that the cases are near-identical except on one dimension (when using the method of difference).

PROCESS TRACING

Since the comparative historical researcher's principal objective is to establish the causal link between a hypothesized factor (or set of factors) and the phenomenon under investigation, it is essential to have appropriate research techniques at one's disposal. While several exist, the one most often used is known as *process tracing*. Process tracing is, as the name suggests, the empirically driven practice of linking a causal factor to the phenomenon by tracing its trajectory over time (Hall 2003; Mahoney 2003; Skocpol 2003). As Jack Goldstone (2003, 48) explains, “process tracing involves making deductions about how events are linked over time, drawing on general principles of economics, sociology, psychology, and political sciences regarding human behavior.” In theory, once the method of agreement or difference has been employed to identify the causal factors of interest, process tracing allows the researcher to follow the development of that factor over time until it results in the phenomenon in question.

In my own research I have used process tracing to link the hypothesized cause, friendly international relations between democratic Western states and authoritarian regimes in the developing world, to my outcome of interest, unarmed revolution (Ritter 2012; 2015). Preliminary research suggested that unarmed revolutions have disproportionately afflicted authoritarian allies of powerful democratic states, while similar movements against autocratic leaders in countries isolated and faced with Western sanctions almost never succumbed to nonviolent challengers. However, identifying this correlation hardly qualified as a causal argument. The task now became to show *why* being on friendly terms with the democratic world put authoritarian regimes at risk of nonviolent overthrow. By examining the histories of pre-revolutionary Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt, it soon became clear that Western patronage shaped the three states *and* their domestic opponents by forcing them to accept the Western rhetoric surrounding democracy and human rights. The three authoritarian regimes hypocritically embraced the West's emphasis on liberal values in order to justify the continuation of their profitable relationships, while dissidents soon realized that speaking the language of democracy and human rights afforded them a certain amount of protection from state repression. Eventually, the West's liberal rhetoric had become so entrenched in society that the authoritarian regimes found it very difficult to use violence against unarmed protesters, since they knew that their Western backers would not condone such practices. In this manner, the cause (friendly international relations) could be connected to the outcome (unarmed revolution).

It is important to note that process tracing is not an inductive social scientific approach, but is rather "focused on the testing of propositions derived from a deductive process of theory formation" (Hall 2003, 395). Like the manner in which any good detective conducts an investigation, the comparative historical analyst instigates the research process on the basis of qualified guesses based on a limited amount of information. The research process therefore becomes a mission to find the evidence that ties the cause (or criminal) to the phenomenon (or crime). Perhaps the most important function filled by the practice of process tracing is to avoid identifying spurious correlations as causal relationships. By identifying the mechanism (rather than the correlation) through which the cause produces the outcome, that mistake is effectively evaded (Mahoney 2003, 363–4).

COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT RESEARCH

As with the application of any method, the researcher must first of all consider whether the application of comparative historical analysis is

compatible with the study's central research question. Due to its emphasis on macro-sociological causal processes and historical trajectories within a comparative context, relatively few social movements scholars have employed CHA (for exceptions, see McAdam 1982; della Porta 1995; Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni 1995; and Slater 2010). Instead, most students of social movements have opted to use ethnographic methods (Amenta 2003, 116) that are better suited to conform with social movement researchers' tendency to emphasize the dynamics and strategies of social movement organizations (SMOs), rather than the larger historical contexts in which those SMOs operate. Thus, for researchers keen to understand how movements organize and sustain themselves, other methods are frequently found to be more appropriate. Still, one can easily imagine social movement research that benefits greatly from a comparative historical approach. For instance, if one wished to understand why a certain country or region of the world experienced a general increase in social movement mobilization at a given point in time while neighboring countries or regions did not, CHA would be an appropriate methodological choice. Similarly, a study asking why right-wing movements rather than left-wing movements have become so powerful in the United States in the twenty-first century might employ a within-case comparative historical method.

Although only used sporadically in social movement research, CHA has become the preferred method of revolution scholars. Nearly every important empirical contribution to the study of revolution produced in the past four decades has employed CHA. Besides Skocpol's monumental treatise, the works of Eisenstadt (1978), Goldstone (1991), Wickham-Crowley (1992), Selbin (1999), Goodwin (2001), Foran (2005), Schock (2005), and Nepstad (2011) come to mind, all of whom studied revolutions and revolutionary movements from a comparative and/or historical perspective. While some have recently strived to enhance the macro-level focus through attention to movement characteristics (Goldstone 2001), the established scholarly understanding of revolutions as long-term processes makes comparative historical analysis an ideal tool for revolution research. Since my own research falls within this subject, the emphasis and examples used in the second part of the chapter will continue to draw primarily from the study of revolutions.

Doing Comparative Historical Analysis

As noted earlier, comparative historical analysis is not a meticulously formulated research method, but rather a flexible approach to social scientific

inquiry. As such, it is only natural that practitioners of CHA develop their own ways of conducting research. What follows here is therefore little more than suggestions about doing comparative historical research that are based on my own experiences. My intention is not to encourage others to copy my strategy. Rather, I simply hope that the reader will find some inspiration in the following pages and perhaps one or two useful tricks.

The comparative historical research process can be divided into five consecutive steps that are discussed individually. First, the researcher chooses a topic and, importantly, an intriguing “puzzle” to solve. Second, the data is identified and gathered. Third, the data is “mined” for evidence to support the author’s thesis as well as for counter-evidence that problematizes it. Fourth, the data is analyzed in preparation of writing. Finally, the comparative historical narrative is composed. This process is applied to each case constituting a part of the study. It is also important to keep in mind that the five-step approach is in practice not linear, as the researcher will inevitably find him- or herself compelled to revisit already engaged tasks continually throughout the duration of the project.

FORMULATING THE PUZZLE AND DESIGNING THE STUDY

Because of its emphasis on causal relationships, theoretical puzzles assume center stage in comparative historical analysis (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 8; Clemens 2007). While scholars often begin their thinking about a particular topic with “what” questions (for instance, “What causes unarmed revolutions?”), the method’s focus on causal mechanisms soon leads the researcher to replace these with “why” questions. Once a hypothesized causal factor, or combination of factors, has been identified, the task becomes to show *why* those factors cause the phenomenon under investigation. In my own research I ask, “Why do some nonviolent revolutionary movements manage to overthrow authoritarian regimes while others fail?” and “Why does there appear to be a trend toward more unarmed revolutions in the last 30 years in contrast to the more violent ‘classical’ social revolutions on the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries?” A comparative historical researcher could admittedly ask “*Why* do some revolutionaries opt for nonviolent tactics over violent ones?” but this question is perhaps more usefully posed as “*How* do revolutionaries select their tactics of struggle?” and would probably be better answered through interviews with revolutionary leaders and movement participants. The puzzle finally settled on should imply both comparative and historical components by pondering the *process* through which change occurs.

Comparative historical puzzles tend to mature in the researcher’s mind over an extended period of time. This is partly due to the comparative dimension of the method, which requires the researcher to be familiar with several

cases. The researcher may initially have a general interest in a given topic, like unarmed revolutions, and must then acquire knowledge of a number of such revolutions before a specific research topic can emerge. Indeed, a relatively broad empirical foundation is necessary, since compelling puzzles problematize historical convergences and/or divergences. With knowledge of only one case, the researcher would be incapable of noting anything out of the ordinary. He or she could, of course, ask “Why was the Iranian Revolution overwhelmingly nonviolent?” without familiarity with other unarmed revolutions, but such a question implicitly asserts that the predominantly nonviolent nature of the Iranian Revolution constitutes a divergence from the norm associated with revolutions. Thus, comparative historical puzzles are frequently identified as puzzles precisely because they highlight a surprising or counter-intuitive dimension of a social phenomenon.

Case Selection

Having acquired broad knowledge of several cases and in possession of a compelling puzzle, the researcher is now in a position to make an informed case selection. (The in-depth knowledge required for the formulation of a causal argument will be attained in the course of the research process.) Although general guidelines for case selection do exist, such as “most similar” and “most different” designs (Przeworski and Teune 1970, 32–9), or “paired comparisons” (Tarrow 2010), such formalized case selection is somewhat rare in comparative historical analysis. Instead, researchers use theoretically grounded arguments to justify their case selections, including their own theoretical frameworks (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 18). While of crucial importance, case selection in comparative historical research is thus less strictly regulated by established scientific practices than in many other research traditions. For example, selecting on the dependent variable, a cardinal sin in quantitative research, is “a quite common and legitimate practice” (della Porta 2008, 212) in comparative historical work. Because the researcher works with a small *n* drawn from an only slightly larger universe of cases, and because generalization beyond the selected cases is not an immediate goal, case selection is mainly of theoretical (as opposed to scientific) import. The researcher’s main task is to convincingly explain why the selected cases constitute a coherent and worthwhile foundation for the study, and that important insights can be gained from a comparison of the proposed cases.

Periodization

A few words should be said about the issue of periodization, or the temporal scope of the study (Katznelson 2003). Similarly to the point addressed above—that the researcher must possess knowledge of a larger number of

cases than eventually selected for study—the researcher must also have a “longer” understanding of the selected cases than the time frame addressed in the study. If the product of a research project covers the 50 years leading up to a given set of revolutions, the researcher is likely familiar with the 100 or more years preceding the revolutions. This is due to the fact that only by discovering what is *not* historically relevant can one convincingly set the temporal boundaries of one’s narrative. Consequently, it is difficult to decide what constitutes the relevant time period of a comparative historical project before the research is well under way.

An inherent problem associated with comparative historical analysis’ causal emphasis is that of “infinite regression,” the potentially never-ending search for the original cause. Since every cause must have a cause of its own, it is quite likely that the quest for causes will soon threaten to turn into extensive histories of each of the cases covered. One solution to this problem is to limit the historical narrative according to the emergence of the hypothesized cause. In my research, I found that Iran’s relationship with the West, and the United States in particular, is central to explaining the nonviolent character of the revolution. Thus, the crucial part of my narrative has its origin in the period around World War II when the United States established a client–patron relationship with Iran (Ritter 2012; 2015). I contextualize this development historically, but anything not immediately related to the emergence of the American–Iranian relationship becomes secondary to the unfolding story.

Less complicated than the starting point of a comparative historical study is its finish line. Still, if one studies a phenomenon like revolutions, or democratization, it can be difficult to determine when the process in question is completed. How do we know when a revolutionary regime or democratizing government has consolidated power? Again, there are few good answers here. Instead, the researcher’s theoretical framework might be the best tool for delimiting the study. My own interest in understanding why some nonviolent revolutionary movements succeed in deposing authoritarian regimes led me to finish my investigation at the point in time when the old government collapses, the timing for which is—with the benefit of hindsight—relatively easy to establish. Since there are few concrete rules to help the researcher delimit the study, “what is needed is periodization that is significant to our theoretical model” (della Porta 2002, 300).

IDENTIFYING THE DATA

The second step in the research process is to identify useful data. Comparative historical researchers typically rely on secondary sources, but primary ones such as archival materials and memoirs may also be used (see Bosi and Reiter

2014). It might be tempting to include previously unused or unknown empirical evidence, much like a historian would, but comparative historical analyses usually stay clear of this aim. Instead, CHA most often employs already existing evidence to “urge the reader to see old problems in a new light” (Skocpol 1979, xi). The objective is not to discover new facts, but to provide a new interpretation of a phenomenon with the help of “old” evidence. Consequently, comparative historical researchers depend on the meticulous work done by historians and area specialists, but also on that produced by sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, psychologists, diplomats, and journalists.

Due to the comparative historical researcher’s dependence on the work of others, an ability to evaluate the credibility of the sources encountered is critical. The easiest way to initially determine the quality of a particular source is to rely on the peer review process: if an article or book has been published in an established journal or by a leading academic press, then one might reasonably expect that its contents have been assessed by other experts in the field. But the further into the research process one gets, the more the researcher assumes the role of expert and becomes better equipped to independently evaluate the quality of the sources consulted. While the editorial approval of an established press or journal is a good sign of the soundness of a source, it is still wise to use caution when citing evidence that only occurs in the writings of one scholar. Preferably, two or more sources should independently reference the same historical event for it to be considered well established.

The identification of suitable sources can either be straightforward or more challenging, largely depending on the topic under investigation. However, because academia in the past few decades has undergone—and continues to undergo—exponential growth, comparative historical researchers rarely face a lack of empirical material to dissect. On the contrary, it can sometimes be difficult, especially for inexperienced researchers, to get a grasp of the vast number of sources available. One solution to this obstacle is to build a bibliography from others’ bibliographies. A simple online search allows the researcher to identify some of the key, recent books about the case in question. If one can find a book published by a leading university press in the past two or three years, then this is usually a good place to start. In the bibliography of that book one would likely find a treasure chest of sources that can then be located and similarly scavenged for additional sources. Naturally, database searches of academic journals are another way to go. Once an initial bibliography has been compiled, the actual research part of the process can begin.

Mining the Data

Since comparative historical analysis relies overwhelmingly on secondary sources, these texts become the researcher’s main sources of evidence. Therefore, for comparative historical analysts, reading *is* data collection.

Academics are rarely encouraged to think carefully about *how* they read, but such reflexivity is necessary for efficient data collection in comparative historical work. While every researcher will undoubtedly formulate personalized strategies in the course of the research process, a few suggestions can be offered. First, I have found it helpful to think of reading as a multi-dimensional activity in which different texts are suitable at different times of the process. Secondary sources used in comparative historical research can helpfully be divided into three categories, which we may call country texts, topic texts, and cause texts.

Early in a given project I prefer to read country texts—broad historical treatises on the country in question. These texts may or may not emphasize the phenomenon of interest—for example, revolutions—but by engaging sweeping historical accounts of a country’s development over centuries, the researcher can acquire a general familiarity with the country under investigation. Due to their grand scope, country texts are bound to de-emphasize certain events that might be of interest to the researcher, but this deficiency is mitigated by the formation of an intimate relationship with the overall most important events and people in the country’s history.

Once the country texts have afforded the researcher a broad familiarity with the case in question, it is time to turn to topic texts—material that focuses specifically on the researcher’s topic of interest, such as accounts of a particular revolution. At this stage, the researcher should be reading the material in great detail. This is not only due to the large amount of empirical evidence likely to be found in these topic texts, but also because they constitute prior attempts to explain the subject of interest. Since topic texts often represent previous attempts to theorize the subject of interest, they may have to be engaged and discussed in their own right in the researcher’s work.

The last category of sources the researcher will encounter are cause texts: books, articles, and chapters dealing specifically with the hypothesized causal factor. For example, if one’s theoretical framework emphasizes international relations, texts dealing with that particular subject should be afforded extra attention. Cause texts frequently “hide out” in more general books (including country and topic texts) or edited volumes, which is why it might be helpful to repeat the technique discussed here and locate a recent “cause text” to pillage for helpful references.

Since comparative historical analysis requires the researcher to read profusely, the amount of evidence collected can quickly become overwhelming and unmanageable unless it is dealt with in a systematic manner. The researcher should therefore try to catalogue the evidence found. Simply putting Post-it notes in books and articles will not suffice, as such a “system” does not facilitate efficient referencing of evidence at a later point. What is needed is a way to quickly and easily find evidence that one might have first encountered months, or even years, ago. To this end, note taking becomes

paramount. My personal preference is to take verbatim notes from texts read and to annotate them with my own thoughts and comments. Naturally, I also record the complete bibliographical information for each note taken.

But to type hundreds of pages of notes is in itself a daunting task. Fortunately, modern technology provides solutions to make this one more manageable. One option is to use a voice recognition program. Rather than typing the notes, the researcher reads aloud the passages deemed important and the program immediately converts the spoken word into editable text in a word processor. The main advantage of this method is its speed as compared to typing, but there are also a few disadvantages. First, the software requires hours of use in order to adapt to the user's voice and thereby minimize "misunderstandings." Second, voice recognition programs demand a silent environment and are therefore not a feasible option in a library or shared office space. A better option might therefore be a handheld scanner. This device, which looks like a highlighter, plugs in to the computer via the USB port or through a Bluetooth connection. As with the voice recognition program, the scanned material appears as editable text in any software that allows typing. Compared to the voice recognition program, however, the pen scanner is quiet, more accurate, and easier to use.

While technology can be usefully employed, it is not a substitute for a systematic approach to data collection. On the contrary, one of the greatest advantages of using a pen scanner, for instance, is that it does not itself lead to research fatigue in the same way that typing might. Pinning a book down with one's elbows while typing with raised shoulders is hardly conducive to extensive note taking. Technological tools can therefore help the researcher maintain a consistent level of note taking throughout the project and assure that the quality of the evidence, not fatigue, dictates what data is collected. Rather than a substitute for methodical data collection, technology can thus enhance the systematic nature of the research process.

ANALYZING THE DATA

Data analysis in comparative historical research is largely done "manually," in the sense that no software can produce "results" for the researcher. In contrast to data analysis in quantitative research, the objective at this step of the process is not to ascertain whether or not the hypothesized factor or factors are indeed the cause of the phenomenon under investigation, but rather to understand how those factors lead to the outcome in question. In other words, the researcher's task is to uncover the mechanism that links the cause to the outcome. While this is by definition an intellectual chore the human brain is well equipped to undertake, computer programs that simplify the analysis of textual data are available. Like other qualitative researchers, the

comparative historical scholar can usefully employ qualitative analysis software like NVivo and Atlas.ti. These programs allow the researcher to code his or her notes, which simplifies accessing information about a certain topic during the writing stage. Atlas, to use the software with which I have the most familiarity, permits the researcher to do this in the following way. The notes taken during the preceding step in the process can be uploaded into the software in one and the same “hermeneutic unit”—Atlas’s term for “project”—thus replacing the practice of dealing with a large number of Word documents individually. Instead, the researcher now has one project file containing all of the notes collected, and is able to move between them via a drop-down menu.

With all notes gathered in one place, the researcher may now code them in a coherent manner. Atlas remembers the codes used and displays them in a separate window. By highlighting the section one intends to code, the program creates individual “quotes” that are treated as individual units of information. Moving through the notes from one case at the time, the researcher is allowed to code all of the notes in a consistent fashion. There is no limit to the number of “labels” (Atlas’s term for code) that can be used within a given project. My own experience suggests that each case will result in 150–200 codes that can later be combined to create more specific ones. When all “p-documents” (the uploaded Word-files) have been coded, a search function within the program instantly grants the researcher access to all the notes coded with a particular label. This function is crucial in the last step of the process, the composing of a manuscript, as empirical evidence necessary for the writing of a section on any given topic simply requires a quick search for the associated code or codes. Rather than sorting through tens or hundreds of Word files for relevant quotes, the researcher now has in his or her possession one document with all pertinent citations. In addition to making the writing process more efficient, this also minimizes the loss of important data.

As with all time- and effort-saving gadgets, qualitative analysis software comes with its limitations. Forgetting to code or miscoding quotes will take them out of consideration in the final step of the process. If the researcher fails to label a particular quote “correctly” in the coding phase, then that quote will obviously not become part of the search results generated later on. Hence, it is important to take the coding phase, which can be both dull and “automatic” (in the sense that the researcher pays only limited attention to each one of hundreds or thousands of quotes to be coded), very seriously. It is also important to give considerable thought to the operationalization of key concepts. If the researcher wants to emphasize the importance of friendly international relations in the narrative, then he or she must figure out what international relations “look” like in the data. State-to-state interactions such as trade, economic aid, and military collaboration are all empirical representations of the theoretical construct “friendly international relations,” and

the researcher should preferably already have these operationalization issues solved by the time the coding process begins. In general, and similarly to the underlying logic of the method itself, choices made in an earlier stage of the research process dictate eventual outcomes: sloppy, inconsistent, or haphazard coding will invariably generate incoherent results in the final text.

Qualitative analysis software can undoubtedly improve the quality of comparative historical work by making it more systematic. However, there are some tasks no software can perform for the comparative historical analyst. For one, it cannot tell us much about the causal relationship between dependent and independent variables, nor can it tell us what variables matter in the first place. This is still for the researcher to determine, and perhaps this should not come as a surprise. As emphasized in the introduction of this chapter, CHA asks big questions and provides answers in the form of causal mechanisms. Consequently, the theoretical explanations proposed require human imagination, which in turn renders computer programs of limited use.

COMPOSING THE NARRATIVE

The composition of the comparative-historical narrative is arguably the most formulaic phase of the entire research process. Whereas the previous steps described most likely differ from one researcher to the next, the way the final account is presented is fairly similar within the methodological genre. In particular, the weaving together of theory and history throughout the text is characteristic of comparative historical work. To this end, scholars often embrace a writing style that prioritizes themes over cases, and that is organized thematically and chronologically rather than by treating the compared cases one by one. The thematic organization allows comparative historical researchers to “comfortably move back and forth between theory and history in many iterations of analysis as they formulate new concepts, discover novel explanations, and refine preexisting theoretical expectations in light of detailed case evidence” (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003a, 13).

In order to compose what Stryker (1996) calls a “strategic narrative” that focuses “attention on how patterns of events relate to prior theoretical beliefs about social phenomena” (Goldstone 2003, 50), the comparative historical researcher has a number of techniques at his or her disposal. For instance, the researcher might employ the process tracing technique discussed earlier; that is, the identification of “steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context” (George and Bennett 2005, 176). Process tracing allows the researcher “to establish and evaluate the link (or the absence of a link) between different factors” and to determine “whether the causal process of the theory that he is using can be observed in the sequence and values of the intervening variables”

(Venesson 2008, 231). Closely related to process tracing is the notion of path dependence (Mahoney 2004, 90–92; Pierson 2003, 195), which emphasizes the importance of the sequencing of social processes. Path dependence, as the term suggests, is the idea that contingent “historical sequences . . . set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties” (Mahoney 2000, 507–8). In the case of unarmed revolutions during the Arab Spring (dependent variable) and international relations (independent variable), an explanation employing path dependence might argue that a nation’s decision to side with either Moscow or Washington during the Cold War has important consequences for how the state later opts to treat its political opponents. Those states that sided with the United States and the West felt forced to officially honor their half-hearted commitment to democracy and human rights and could therefore not resort to outright repression of unarmed protesters. Allies of the former Soviet Union, on the other hand, were not trapped by commitments to liberal values and thus suffered fewer qualms about shooting unarmed protesters in the street. Thus, a decision made in the 1960s or 1970s can have a direct impact on decisions made in 2011 and beyond (Ritter 2015).

Path-dependent explanations are often criticized for being overly deterministic. A more nuanced approach to historical causations may instead consider “critical junctures” that can take a nation down a certain road, but that also allows room for the reversal of trajectories at subsequent critical junctures (Collier and Collier 1991). The fact that comparative historical analysts prefer to speak in the language of probabilities should, however, not conceal the fact that history is considered a powerful force whose course is difficult to alter. While there is room for human agency, structural conditions remain the most likely causes in comparative historical explanations of macro level phenomena.

As in the data collection and analysis phases, comparative historical researchers can make use of technological advancements in the writing phase. Writing software, such as Scrivener, provides an alternative to standard word processors. Similarly to Atlas, one of Scrivener’s main advantages is that it collects all elements of a project into one file. Instead of creating a separate Word document for each chapter or main section, Scrivener permits the user to keep all components of a book or article in one place, which makes both writing and editing easier, as text can be easily moved from one section or chapter to another. Scrivener also offers a split-screen layout that facilitates the writing of two chapters/sections at the same time. Furthermore, PDFs and other file types can be uploaded into the project file and thus read from within the software. This again reinforces the greatest advantage of the program, namely the fact that all components of a research project can be kept in one and the same place.

Comparative Historical Analysis: Some Conclusions

Comparative historical analysis is a demanding and meticulous approach to social science research. Yet, if the objective is to discover causal mechanisms that explain macro-level phenomenon, few methods are as well suited for the task as CHA. This chapter introduced the reader to comparative historical analysis within the context of social movement and revolution research. After providing a brief overview of the method, its main objective was to suggest one way of practically doing comparative historical analysis. To that end, a five-step approach to the method has been offered. To imply that this simple guide should serve as a blueprint for future research has, of course, not been my intention. Instead, my hope is that young scholars ready to embark on the intimidating task of comparative historical analysis will find information and practices that they can themselves refine and that way bring the collective effort surrounding the research approach forward. It is worth emphasizing in conclusion that CHA should perhaps not be thought of as “a theory or specific method or technique, but as an approach that has been undertaken by scholars with varied academic, theoretical, and methodological affiliations and preferences” (Amenta 2003, 93). As such, CHA comes in many shapes or forms. Undoubtedly, many of those shapes and forms are still waiting to be developed.

■ NOTE

1. I will still use the term “method” in order to be consistent with the other chapters in this volume.

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6 Historical Methodologies

Archival Research and Oral History in Social Movement Research

Lorenzo Bosi and Herbert Reiter

Contentious politics has been studied by historians (for a recent literature review, see Dill and Aminzade 2007), and historical cases of collective action have been the interest of social scientists.¹ However, methodological reflections on historical approaches in social movement research are rare (Clemens and Hughes 2002), often concentrating on providing social movement scholars with categories of historical sources useful for recovering past protest and lists of depositories where such sources might be found. In this chapter, we focus instead on the practical problems social movement scholars are bound to encounter when using historical sources. In addition, in the conclusions, we attempt to discuss what social movement scholars can learn from specifically historical approaches.²

Historical approaches are in their essence critical approaches to systematically examining the credibility, representativeness, and meaning of primary sources—that is, documents, images, or artifacts that provide evidence about the past and have been created contemporaneously with the event(s) under discussion. With reference to the scientific method, the work of a historian has been equated with the work of a judge, who also has to correlate testimonies with material evidence in order to deduce what really happened (Ginzburg 1999). Historians assess the authenticity and validity of the sources they use, which are not objective, but “shaped by the politics, practices, and events that selectively document protest” (Clemens and Hughes 2002, 201). The procedure of historical inquiry implies some central steps: first, relevant sources have to be identified, found, and selected; second, sources need to be registered and classified in preparation of further analysis; third, the collected materials are subjected to critical inquiry, in particular about “the institutional processes that produced them” (Dill and Aminzade 2007, 269); and finally analysis can proceed in multiple directions.

In what follows, we concentrate mainly on two historical methodologies: archival research and oral history. Archival research is the principal historical method for collecting primary sources. By uncovering as yet unused material and unexplored fields of research, and in particular by exposing researchers to aspects of process, context, sequence, and timing, archival work can make important contributions to theory building, data collection, and hypothesis testing (Frisch et al. 2012, 11ff.).

In contrast to social scientists, historians for the most part do not generate their own data. A different argument should be made for oral history.³ This is a methodological technique used to provide firsthand historical accounts, on “aspects that are not present in the documentary sources or official records” (Blee 2012, 623). It gives voice to those who have mobilized, opposed, or stood by past protests. Oral history is a method that allows researchers on the one hand to reconstruct a particular historical period from the side of those who did mobilize, and on the other hand to learn about respondents’ memory, understood as an activity that gives meaning to the past by (re)constructing it as a narrative in the present. Combined with other methods of research, oral history is a methodological tool utilized for “exploration, discovery and interpretation of complex social events and processes” (Blee and Taylor 2002, 93).

Archival Research

Most historical work, in social movement studies as elsewhere, is based on archival research. In the following, we first sketch the connection between the development of history as an academic profession and the emergence of modern state archives. We then discuss the process of selection of material for permanent storage and the conditions for the consultation of archival records. Finally, we indicate the types of archives useful for social movement research, presenting examples of the kind of material researchers can expect to find, generated by both state agencies and social movements.

HISTORY AS A SCIENCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

The early development of history as an academic profession in the nineteenth century was dominated by the German conception of historical science and thus by a specific scientific model which continues to exert its influence today. This model consists in the critique of documentary evidence. Establishing historical “facts” by a careful and extensive reading of archival sources was

considered the essence of the historian's work (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 14–16). If the conviction of professional historians that immersion in the sources would assure a perception of the past that corresponded to reality has long been modified, the historian is still bound by his or her (archival) sources, and the critical apparatus with which he or she approaches them remains in many ways the same. Sources are, however, viewed more cautiously, with a growing awareness of the extent to which they do not directly convey reality but are themselves narrative constructs that reconstruct these realities (Iggers 2005, 144).

This early model of historical science developed shortly after the emergence of the kind of modern state archives we are used to—that is, archives that store those documents generated by the state administration that are considered of such importance for legal or historical reasons as to be permanently preserved and made accessible for consultation by scholars or, in principle, by any interested citizen. The term “archive,” in fact, has a more restricted meaning for professional archivists than in everyday usage, where it stands for more or less anything that is not a library, storing a larger amount of written information. In the strict professional sense, instead, an archive is an institution storing archival records that have to fulfill three conditions: a) they were generated within the professional (not private) activities of a juridical or natural person; b) they are not necessary any more for current affairs; c) they are of permanent value (Burkhardt 2006a). Following a practice starting with the emergence of modern state archives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, archives catalogue, register, and store documents according to a protocol system that links them to a specific bureaucratic process responsible for their generation. In modern archives, a key element in establishing the authenticity of documents is, in fact, the authentic role of the materials within an administration (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 19).

The archives emerging with the modern states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, were not open to the public, but restricted spaces: access to them was a privilege, not a right. A turning point in this respect arrived with the French Revolution, when it was decided to make accessible the records of the former state, the Ancien Régime. The Archives Nationales were created in 1790, with specific legislation designing the records of the previous regimes as historical documents, separating them from contemporary and future records. For the management of these documents, special archival staff were employed, well trained in French history, different from their colleagues managing the current documents. Similar developments can be seen in other countries, for instance in Great Britain with the establishment of the Public Record Office in 1838. In these archives, records were preserved on the basis of their presumed historical importance, and they were organized to preserve the “national heritage.” Among the major states there were two notable latecomers: in Russia the historical archives were created

only after the fall of the tsar; and in the United States the National Archives were created only in 1934 (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 20ff.).

The fact that, starting with the French Revolution, state archives became accessible for research certainly constituted a liberalization. However, this liberalization did not change the main characteristic of the bulk of material stored in these archives: whether collected under the conception of “national heritage” or, subsequently, the more neutral one of “records of permanent value,” the overwhelming majority of documents housed were generated by the state administration. This characteristic carries with it the risk of favoring state-centered analyses of historical problems and the writing of a “history from above,” including on periods of an ever-growing importance of civil society actors. Particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, however, a growing number of non-state historical archives developed, established by “old” social movements and their organizations, by national and international non-governmental organizations, and by new social movements. In addition, certain research institutes established independent archival collections. These archives became of growing importance for research in their fields of competence.

Among the non-state archives, those of large and well-established organizations and of research institutes are usually recognized as public or semi-public institutions and receive regular funding, provided either directly by the state or by foundations. They follow the professional model and standards established by state archives and with these can be grouped together under the term “established archives.” The archives of new social movements, on the contrary, for the most part are characterized by a precarious financial situation, relying on voluntary contributions and short-term project funding, and many of them are threatened in their existence. These “free archives” mostly owe their foundation and their continued existence to the dedication of small groups of activists, not trained as archivists.

THE SELECTION PROCESS OF ARCHIVAL RECORDS

As already mentioned, what researchers can find in archives is not “everything” produced by the state administration, an institution, or an organization in a given time period, but a selection. In most countries, for today’s state archives, the steps of the typical selection process are determined by administrative and legal rules that attribute a key role, and considerable discretion, to the professional archivists. According to the German federal law on archives (*Bundesarchivgesetz*), for example, all branches of the federal administration have to offer all the materials they no longer need for the fulfillment of their public duties (including the safeguarding of the security of the federal republic) to the federal archives; they must hand them over to the archives if they

are records of permanent value. It is the federal archives that (in conjunction with the offering institution) decide whether the records are of permanent value for the research and understanding of German history, for the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of citizens, or for providing information on legislation, administration, or jurisdiction. If general guidelines on establishing the “permanent value” of records do exist and in recent times have been frequently discussed, concrete decisions remain hidden from public scrutiny.⁴ In any case, only a small number of the records generated by modern administrations end up for permanent storage in archives. According to the website of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), these are about 2 to 5 percent of the US federal records generated in any given year. For Germany, it has been estimated that between 3 and 10 percent of the administrative records generated since 1948 have been handed over to archives (Burkhardt 2006a).⁵

Obviously, to preserve permanently all records generated by modern administrations would, in the shortest of time, overtax the storage capacities of archives. As of 2010, the French Archives Nationales alone possessed 406 km of records (the total length of occupied shelves put next to each other), which together with the holdings of the departmental and local city archives added up to 3.159 km under the supervision of the French archives administration. In fact, one of the biggest problems faced by archives today is the sheer number of documents generated by modern administrations and organizations. To give just one example: the very short presidency of Gerald Ford from 1974 to 1977 generated more documents than the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1933 to 1945 (Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 47).

Digitalization represents no immediate solution for this problem. A first obstacle is the sheer cost of such an operation: it has been estimated that the four state archives of the German federal state of Saxony would have to employ 100 people for 22 years in order to scan their records, which would mean doubling the number of employees, not to mention providing the necessary scanners, computers, software, and so on. Digitalizing the paper holdings of the US National Archives would signify embarking on a project three times as big as the Google book-scanning project, if one estimates the results of that project on the basis of ten million books averaging 300 pages each. In addition, for archival purposes a suitable storage device for electronic media does not exist. What computer experts consider as long-term storage (up to ten years) bears no resemblance to the permanent storage archives are legally bound to provide for their records. As is well known to archivists faced with a growing number of electronic data with which they are entrusted, the conservation of digital records calls for continuous attention and adaptation in order to keep them readable and consultable.⁶

A further argument for selecting only a small part of the records generated for permanent storage is the fact that only the “cassation” of the unnecessary

enables the archives to structure and preserve their records and make them accessible for consultation. Indispensable for consultation is in fact the archivists' work in classifying records and elaborating repertoires and finding aids.

However, the selection process of records for permanent storage in archives is not only conditioned by the fairly recent problem of "bulk." As we have seen, notwithstanding the affirmation in the "about us" section of the US National Archives that "in a democracy, records belong to the people," a restricted and specialized group of archivists decides (based on certain rules and regulations) on the permanent storage of documents in archives. Even if we do not consider the loss of records due to natural disaster, war, or neglect, certain records may never enter the archivists' evaluation process. Notwithstanding the fact that in contemporary modern democracies specific legislation lays down rules for when and how what kind of documents are supposed to be offered to the historical archives, institutions and organizations may try to purge their material; this will only sometimes leave traces in the finding aids to which users have access. Therefore, one can imagine that for certain records (and not only documents generated by the secret services) of such historical importance as to merit permanent storage, one cannot find any trace of their existence in the archives. However, the sheer size of the collections makes a systematic "sanitizing" of records unlikely, as this would entail going through hundreds or thousands of boxes full of documents (Frisch et al. 2012, 16ff.).

Among the non-state historical archives, only those of established organizations like political parties or trade unions receive a steady flow of documents no longer needed for current affairs from their mother organizations. In a process similar to the one described for state archives, they also have to select those records designated for permanent storage. All other non-state archives depend for acquisitions to their collections on donations which, at least in part, need to be solicited and actively pursued and which are directed by the mission of these archives. Research institutes, for instance, acquire records for their archives following the (sometimes changing) direction indicated by a scientific committee.⁷ Decisions of archives of political movements, be they parties or social movements, may have (also possibly changing) political motivations. In this context, researchers need to consider that neither a party, nor a movement, nor (in the case of private archives) an individual is necessarily the best archivist of their history.

In all archives, however, including the "free archives" of new social movements, the process of acquisition normally includes selecting documents for storage and discarding unwanted material. In fact, not only researchers but also the larger public should be aware of the dimensions of the selection processes in any kind of archive in terms of records stored and material discarded. In times of shrinking resources of space, personnel, and money, the relationship probably will become more and more unfavorable for storage. In this context, the absence of a discussion of the selection criteria and decisions

going beyond the restricted circle of archivists have to be underlined. Not even many historians seem to reflect seriously on the possible influence of this aspect of archiving on the future elaboration of memory. In fact, it is not said that the selection criteria of today's archivists would be shared by tomorrow's historians or social scientists.

RESTRICTIONS ON AND CONDITIONS FOR THE CONSULTATION OF ARCHIVAL RECORDS

By law, everybody has the right to access public archives. Private archives, however, may be more restrictive. Some of the "free archives" of new social movements, for instance, refuse to give access to people with the "wrong" intentions. This attitude is justified not only by political considerations or by the wish to "protect our memory," but also by the necessity of protecting the donors of material that may contain information that still today may provoke negative consequences for individuals. In fact, professional archivists admit that they have difficulties acquiring material from the new social movement scene precisely because public archives give access to everybody. The trust that "free archives" enjoy in this respect plays an important role in the conservation of certain material (Rehm 2007, 343).

A very specific problem for archival research is access to classified material in state archives. Leaving aside the obvious difficulties of verifying the validity of content of such material and of reconstructing the context in which it was generated, access often depends on subjective and single-case decisions and not on comprehensive and generally applied regulations. According to article 122 of the Italian *codice dei beni culturali*, it is the interior ministry that decides case by case on the accessibility of classified material. For archives, the storage of classified material is complicated by the necessity for special storage facilities and security checks for personnel and potential users. Additional difficulties arise in the evaluation and cataloguing of classified material that often was never registered in the normal bureaucratic fashion (Niederhut and Zuber 2010).

Usually, after a certain time period, archival records containing sensitive data undergo a declassification process and become available for unrestricted consultation. Declassification, however, may not be irreversible: in March 2006, it was revealed by the Archivist of the United States in a public hearing that a memorandum of understanding between the National Archives and Records Administration and various government agencies (among others, the CIA and the Air Force) existed to "reclassify," that is, withdraw from public access, certain documents in the name of national security, and to do so in a manner such that researchers would not be likely to discover the process.⁸

Still, once declassified and consultable, in all probability archival records will provide a more complete documentation than citizens can get today under legislation like the US Freedom of Information Act, asking the security forces for the records on their person. For instance, large parts of the FBI files the singer/songwriter Country Joe McDonald received on that basis are blacked out and made unreadable (see <www.countryjoe.com/FBI.htm>; accessed March 23, 2014).

Even without outright classification (or reclassification), agencies may try to maintain an influence on the access to their records after they were handed over to the archives. An example is the Carabinieri, one of Italy's national police forces which, in contrast with normal procedures, store their historical records in their own archive. A history of the Carabinieri contains the methodological note that their official archives were not accessible, thus explaining the subtitle of the book, which reads "image and self-representation of the Carabinieri" (Oliva 1992, 7f.). Similarly, a publication on the OVRA, the fascist secret political police, underlines the absolute impenetrability of the historical archive of the Carabinieri (Franzinelli 1999, 5 n. 8).

In public archives, the normal archival records become consultable without restrictions after 30 years. However, these archives generally make users responsible for respecting the legal provisions on the protection of private data and on copyright. Usually, private data can be used only with the consent of the respective individuals or after their death (in the absence of a known date of death, a life span of 90 years is assumed). The protection of private data, however, does not extend to documents generated by a person in his or her public function. For private archives, or the archives of organizations or firms, and for records stored in public archives on the basis of donations by individuals, organizations, or firms, more restricted access conditions may exist, set by the donor. In these cases, it may be possible to apply for a waiving of restrictions.

In general, however, it is not restrictions or similar limitations that make historical research in the archives a potentially frustrating exercise. Archival research calls for time and patience: as archivists readily admit, there is hardly any other medium of information with such a miserable relation between time needed and quantitative yield (Burkhardt 2006b). For the most part, it is not possible to subject archival records to automatic searches for keywords or names. The typical archival document is in paper form and, up to the beginning of the twentieth century, handwritten. In addition, documents are ordered in folders not according to pertinence—that is, importance for a given subject—but according to provenance—that is, the office and the bureaucratic process that generated it, following the original chronological order. A lot of reading of documents not directly pertinent to the research question may be necessary before arriving, within the records of a given bureaucratic process, at any interesting material.⁹

The filing according to provenance, however, is not done in order to test researchers' threshold of frustration, but for good reason. As mentioned earlier, in modern archives the authentic role of the materials within an administration is a key element for evaluating their authenticity. For a historian, this means that he/she will be suspicious about the authenticity of a document that appears as a single piece, not embedded in a larger file, a correspondence, or a bureaucratic process. Usually only this surrounding material can allow you to draw significant conclusions about the authenticity of a document and about why, for what purpose, and by whom the document was created. To give one example: if a document of the late 1940s of a presumed military command of the Italian Communist Party of the region Emilia Romagna ends with the very formal phrase "distinti saluti. Ossequi," you will become suspicious.¹⁰ Such a formal, even obsequious sign-off—equivalent to something like "distinct salutations. Deepest deference" in English—would have been an odd thing for a 1940s Italian Communist to write. If it were found in the archive of the Communist Party, you would wonder about what kind of Communist was the person who wrote it. If the document was found (as it was) in the files of the interior ministry in a folder containing mostly police reports based on anonymous informants, you would question its authenticity as an internal document of the Communist Party (see also Burkhardt 2006a).

ASSESSING ARCHIVES FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENT RESEARCH

Before embarking on archival research, careful preparation in individuating archival sources of potential interest and their location is advisable. A not unimportant initial consideration to be made is in fact logistical. Archives, differently from libraries, store documents that usually exist only in one copy, they do not give them out on loan, and scans can be ordered usually only after having personally selected the relevant material. Therefore, the only way to consult archival records is in the reading room of the chosen archive. Considering that archival research can be very time consuming, it may entail considerable costs for travelling to and staying in sometimes distant places. Researchers should therefore conduct a serious cost-benefit calculation prior to committing to archival research.

A careful analysis of the secondary literature and interviews with experts can serve as first steps for establishing what kind of archival records may be of interest for a given topic and research questions. Guides to the archives in different countries contain information about the respective holdings.¹¹ By now, at least the important archives have made information on their holdings, including finding aids, available on their websites. However, on the Internet one usually cannot find references to all the records in the possession of the respective archives. It is therefore advisable to contact archives directly, via

letter or e-mail, stating precisely the topic and research question. Professional archivists do not only provide information about the records stored in their archive but may also be able to indicate additional holdings in other locations. For a detailed evaluation of what types of records can be found in a given archive, a personal visit to the archive, a direct discussion with the responsible archivist, and the consultation of all relevant finding aids are necessary. However, as the information on the content of the archival records contained in finding aids is usually (very) scarce, in particular for earlier periods, potential users must be aware that only the consultation of the individual files will enable them to evaluate the quality of the material.

Important archival records for social movement research can be found in state archives. The type of records that are of interest naturally depend on the movement under study and on the research question. For research on student movements, for instance, the files of the ministry of education and the archives of universities should be of interest (the university archive of the Free University in Berlin, for example, houses the archive “APO und soziale Bewegungen”); for research on labor disputes, one should consult the files of the economic and labor ministries; and for research on political violence, judicial records. The most important generators of archival material on social movements, however, have been interior ministries and police forces.¹² It is certainly worthwhile for social movement scholars to overcome skepticism about the feasibility of using these types of records for anything else but the reconstruction of state response to social movements. Obviously, however, critical reading methods need to be applied, considering the type of document under study, who produced it, for what purpose, and so on.¹³

As far as protest event analysis is concerned, for the post-World War II history of the Federal Republic of Germany it has been argued that police records may be more accurate sources than newspaper reports (Hocke 1998). If we take the example of May Day celebrations in Berlin before World War I, police records provide an important confirmation about the trends in the participation figures emerging from an analysis of the social democratic newspaper “Vorwärts” (see Figure 6.1).¹⁴

In addition, police records are often the only source on smaller protest events. Staying with the example of May Day celebrations in Berlin, only in the police archives can sufficient information be retrieved on the events organized by anarchists or, for the period of the Weimar republic, by smaller left-wing groups in competition with the Social Democrats and Communists.

Obviously, the reliability of police reports can vary considerably—concerning the speeches held at May Day events, one can find short accounts in governmental language, as well as detailed transcriptions closely mirroring movement terminology—and has to be carefully evaluated. In this context, twentieth it can be useful to consider also the public archives on lower territorial levels. Local police records, for instance, are usually stored in regional or local

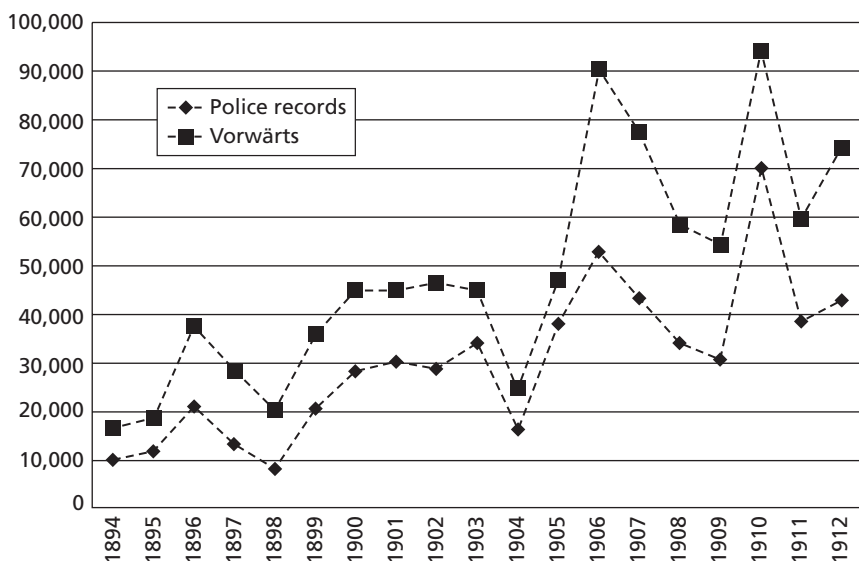


Figure 6.1 Participation in the May Day Morning Assemblies in Berlin, 1894–1912

archives. Their material not only allows a closer reconstruction of events but also permits the researcher to document the transformation of information as it travels from the local to the central level, as an example from Florence (Italy) shows. Whereas the reports of the local precinct police depicted the actions of tuberculosis patients throughout the immediate post World War II years as the protests of ill people against insufficient treatment and neglect, for the higher ranks transmitting the information to Rome, these campaigns were transformed, with the growing tension of the Cold War, into subversive actions provoked by communist agitators against the political, social, and moral order of the country (della Porta and Reiter 2003, 47ff.).

The records of the interior ministries and the police forces contain material generated not only by state agencies but also by social movements. The interior ministry of Prussia, for instance, collected, although more selectively, newspapers and other publications of “subversive” movements on specific events like May Day. Because a lot of this printed material was lost or destroyed during the war, the coverage of May Day by the newspapers of the workers’ movement of certain cities to a large extent can be found only in collections of this type in state archives. In particular, the records of the local police authorities contain material generated by the movements that would have been lost had it not been preserved by the police: leaflets, transcriptions of graffiti, descriptions of slogans shouted and banners carried at demonstrations, reports on talks and discussions held at demonstrations or meetings,

and so on. In this context, researchers should bear in mind that police forces may have routinely filed as unimportant material of significant importance for social movement research.¹⁵

Also important for social movement research are many non-state established archives, in particular those of the political parties and organizations of the workers' movement—for example, the Archiv für soziale Demokratie of the Friedrich Ebert foundation in Germany, which houses the records of the German trade unions and the Social Democratic Party, or the Istituto Gramsci, which holds the records of the Italian Communist Party. As mentioned earlier, in their internal organization these archives follow the established archival practice of state archives, including the ordering of their holdings according to provenance. Of a similar professional outlook are research institutions whose collections concentrate more on the New Left, such as the Feltrinelli Foundation in Italy or the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam.

Concerning material directly generated by new social movements, however, the established archives have reduced or discontinued their activities because of shrinking resources.¹⁶ This development has dramatically increased the importance of the “free archives” of new social movements for the conservation of material concerning politics “from below” since the 1960s. Most of these by now numerous movement archives—for Germany alone a recent guide counted more than 200 and among these *ca.* 60 larger ones (Hüttner 2003)—see themselves as a part of political, cultural, or social projects and understand archival work as a by-product of political activism. In fact, many archives have developed out of the documentation centers of social movements. A smaller group of movement archives understands archival work as their most important task. They have become increasingly professionalized and evolved into what has been called “memory archives,” although without giving up a clearly political orientation.¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, most of the “free archives” are private initiatives run by activists and often face a precarious financial situation. On the one hand, the decidedly movement character of these initiatives may overcome the skepticism of potential donors not prepared to give their material to a state institution; on the other hand, their precarious situation threatens their continuous existence, and lack of expertise and/or adequate facilities may endanger the conservation of their collections. Collaboration with professional archives, for which an unconditioned interest on the side of these archives seems to be a necessary condition, unfortunately is rare.¹⁸

The holdings of movement archives for the most part concentrate on printed material like leaflets, brochures, and newspapers, and often they are a mixed form between archive and library.¹⁹ This characteristic, however, reflects not only the precarious situation of most movement archives, but also the very characteristics of new social movement organizations, which are increasingly

short-lived, informal, and fragmented, and unlikely to rely on the kind of bureaucratic processes of state administrations and classical organizations that are the basis for classification and filing in traditional archives.

For the future of archival documentation, the growing importance of Internet communication in the organization of new social movements will offer resources but will also raise problems that in all probability will go far beyond those emerging in projects aimed at permanently storing in archives the Internet presence of traditional organizations like political parties.²⁰ Only time can tell whether memory projects of certain major movements like the social forum process or the indignados are conducted with the necessary completeness, continuity, and persistence.²¹ Even more skepticism has to reign concerning the documentation of smaller movements. Unfortunately, there is a good chance that the more modern a social movement, the greater will be the difficulties for future historians to reconstruct its development.

Material interesting for social movement research may also be found in private archives. However, these may not be easy to locate, and their consultation raises several problems. The challenge for researchers in using private holdings lies in the necessity to reconstruct, in the absence of a known archival tradition and established practices, the selection process at the basis of the collections—that is, in establishing how systematically which kind of materials were chosen for preservation. In addition, researchers need to get an idea about the institutional, organizational, and time context of the collection and, if absent, they need to devise a system of reference for the material. In short, to a certain extent, researchers must also fulfill the tasks of archivists.

Oral History: Techniques and Practices

Historians have repeatedly pointed to the phenomenon that if, on the one hand, the number of documents produced by modern administrations and organizations grew exponentially with the introduction of typewriters, on the other hand growing verbal communication (in meetings and especially by telephone) has led to a diminishing importance in the content of certain records. As a possible solution, particularly for the reconstruction of informal decision-making structures and of the motives for decisions in administrations and organized groups, the conducting of interviews was proposed (Niethammer 1980, 9; Spohr Readman 2009, 136–7). The same path seems even more strongly indicated for the study of new social movements which—as mentioned—because of their informal and fragmented nature produce and leave behind only in a limited way the same kind of documentary evidence as classical organizations. The “new” data obtained with oral history techniques

can clarify, elaborate, re-contextualize, or even challenge previous understanding based exclusively on documentary sources. In addition, it allows for triangulating different sources in the investigation of the same question in order to complement and remedy problems of validity, reliability, and time bias, through multiple checks.

Oral history has been particularly promoted as a method of accessing subjugated voices, excluded from the historic records for reasons of political, geographic, class, gender, or ethnic affiliation. Exclusion can be imposed consciously from the outside or culturally from within. Oral history techniques enable the researcher to analyze the subjectivity and agency of voices that in archival records are largely represented only through the lens of state agencies or of main social movement organizations. Social movement scholars in fact have used oral history approaches to study, for example, political involvement in the 1968 movements (Fraser 1988; Gildea, Mark, and Warring 2013); in the Black Civil Rights Movement (Morris 1984; Robnett 1996); in the feminist movement (Gluck and Patai 1991); and in LGBT activism (Taylor and Rupp 1991).

Oral history interviewing can use the past politically in order to shape the present and the future. In doing so, it empowers groups of individuals who have been marginalized, even awkward ones (Blee 1993). In the 1960s and then in the 70s, for instance, various social movement groups in Italy employed methods similar to oral history—such as “*inchiesta operaia*” (workers’ inquiry; see the writings of Renato Panzieri in Merli 1994); “*conricerca*” (with-research, Alquati 1993), and “*autoricerca*” (self-research, Alquati 1975)—as an act to counter the subjugation of their voices (“*presa della parola*,” or taking the floor) (Bonomo 2013). In fact, the attention to subjectivity that this technique of data collection reflects makes it particularly adept for studying recognition struggles. Investigations of resistant communities in third-world countries through the use of oral history are a further use of this methodological tool. For a literature that has been so much constructed in the Western world, as has been often recognized (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), oral history offers a valuable tool to overcome this bias; for example, if we look at illiterate communities for whom oral communication presents one of their few access points to the past.

We will discuss two techniques used in oral history: simple respondent interviews aimed at reconstructing the history of social movements, and interviews aimed at analyzing their memory. Both are forms of semi-structured qualitative interviews, and the distinction between them is fluid: both are interactive interviews with open questionnaires and can produce excellent material on both the history of social movements and on their memory.

Researchers use simple respondent interviews, together with life histories and key informant interviews, to understand social movements of the past. This methodological technique can complement archival research or

substitute it in the case of insufficient documentary sources. Researchers who use simple respondent interviews treat “interviewees as both informants and respondents” (Blee and Taylor 2002, 106). Relevant research questions are, for example, the motives of rank-and-file activists for joining mobilizations (Bosi 2012) and withdrawing from them (Bosi 2013); the reconstruction of past movements’ structure, strategy, culture, and internal dynamics (Bosi 2006); the analysis of how past social movements perceived their socio-political opportunities (Bosi 2008); and of the relations they shared with other actors in the socio-political environment (Bosi 2008).

Collective memory research is most properly the study of memory of particular past issues or events, which includes the way in which memories grow, change, and operate in the time between then and now. This technique has received some form of recognition also among traditional historians. In fact, one possible weakness of oral history techniques has been turned into a strength, since the unreliability of memory has become the argument of study in order to understand the meanings of the issues/events under scrutiny. Oral history becomes then a methodology about subjectivity that recognizes that memory stories are contingent and often fluid. As Donatella della Porta suggests, this “research trend stresses the value of subjective interpretation in the definition of the reality, and against the scholar’s monopoly of knowledge” (1992, 173). Oral history, following the collective memory research, is not just a method to gather information on past events; “[i]t is a creative, interactive methodology that forces us to get to grips with many layers of meaning and interpretation contained within people’s memories” (Abrams 2009, 18). Differently from life histories, where the aim is to reconstruct personal experience, this type of oral history aims to reconstruct present memories of individuals on particular past issues/events and of the meanings they attach to them (Passerini 1979, 1988, 2004; Portelli 1990, 1991; Frisch 1990; Grele 1991). As Portelli suggests, “oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what now they think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, of the material cost of a strike to the workers involved; but they tell us a good deal about its psychological costs” (1991, 50). Collective memory research methodology is an excellent tool for situating the experience of social movement activists within a cultural context. In other words, this method can link personal stories with collective memory, political culture, social power, and so forth, showing the interplay between the individual and the society in which she or he lives. Following this line of research, the focus can be on the political roles played by popular memory, like the linking of past events with contemporary political and cultural narratives and how changing cultural contexts affect the remembering of past events.

PLANNING INTERVIEWS

Oral history interviews are mostly conducted face-to-face with one individual, but they can also be conducted with more than one person (2–3) and by telephone or virtual media. Regardless of how they are conducted, oral history interviews are an expensive, time consuming, and frequently unpredictable exercise. It seems very hard to reduce oral history interviewing to a set of techniques or rules. However, while there is some validity in the saying that “the only way to learn how to do it is to do it,” there are certain steps to take before, during, and after the conducting of interviews to help make this experience as successful as possible. A cardinal rule is careful preparation in order to define the focus of inquiry. This needs to be thoroughly researched, through secondary and primary sources, before starting to make interviews. As Brian Rathbun suggests:

This allows him or her . . . to figure out what is known and what is not known so questions can be more targeted and efficient; to understand how the debate is framed in different contexts (nation states, cultures, time periods, etc.) in the case that the issue involves political conflict as it generally does in political science; and to develop expectations about what interview data would be evidence for his or her initial hypothesis or other competitors. (Rathbun 2008, 695–6)

SELECTION AND ACCESS

Selecting whom you want to interview in order to reconstruct past social movements is determined more by the purposes of the study at the theoretical level than by concerns with the representativeness of a historical population (on which we have little uncontested knowledge). The secondary literature, the archives, and the Web are all important sources for the identification of initial respondents. For the identification of additional respondents, at the end of each interview the interview partner should be asked to indicate other possible interviewees, a technique usually referred to as “snowball” or “referral” sampling. However, oral history interviewing has the tendency to over-represent former young activists. Social movement researchers should be aware of this risk and seek to fill gaps through the use of, for example, archival sources.

Usually, when additional interviews yield diminishing results, a saturation point has been reached where there is no need to add further interviews. Between 20 and 30 interviews can be considered a reasonable target for a project in which interviewing is one of the principal methods. Future publications making use of the oral history interviews conducted should include a table categorizing the respondents (Bosi 2012, 379–82).

Obviously, accessing a respondent is a sampling issue in itself. Having been part of the past movement under study may be helpful in order to access former activists, who might trust the researcher as one of them. However, such a connection may foreclose the opportunity to enter into contact with strands of the movement different from the one in which the interviewer participated. If he/she has no personal direct contacts with former activists, the best opportunity to approach possible respondents is through an e-mail or a phone call, in which the project and the reason why an interview with this specific respondent may be of particular benefit for the project should be briefly explained. If the name of a possible respondent has been provided to the researcher by another former activist, this should be mentioned, as it may augment the credibility of the request for potential subjects who are in doubt about the trustworthiness and competence of the researcher. Contacting a possible respondent, the researcher should allow a large time frame for the scheduling of the meeting, as this makes it harder for the contacted person to refuse.

Researchers need to recognize that, even if they look at past events, some communities will be more difficult to access than others. This may constitute a major sampling problem, which one of the authors encountered in his research on the contentious politics of the 1960s and 1970s in Northern Ireland. With the Civil Rights Movement the snowballing strategy worked well: it was particularly helpful to state, during the interview, whom the researcher had already met, since this activated some kind of competition among former activists to give the story of a particular strand within the movement (Bosi 2006). In subsequent research on the Republican Movement, however, this strategy did not work and instead failed to get a consistent number of interviews from one part of the movement (Bosi 2012). In fact, being frank with both former Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) activists that the plan of the research was to listen to both sides of the movement antagonized those who had belonged to the OIRA. They released only two interviews and then decided to stop being interviewed. The internal violent conflict, even if almost 30 years old, between these two strands of the Republican Movement was still so intense that having first conducted a large number of interviews with former PIRA activists moved the former OIRA activists to the defensive and led them to cut any contact with the researcher.

PREPARING A GUIDELINE AND CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Despite the fact that the types of interviews discussed are unstructured, a guideline should be prepared in order to allow the interviewee to lead the discussion and fully explore and articulate his/her remembered experience.

Rather than creating a set list of questions that must be followed exactly, the interviewer should develop a guideline of topics that will be covered during the interview. In this way, the respondent who is the expert on that particular historical period should be allowed maximum opportunity during the interview to open up new topics that may lead to areas of inquiry not previously considered by the researcher. Even if it is important to have some structure, it is most vital with this particular type of technique to let the respondent's human agency and subjectivity come through.

Interview questions should be short, uncomplicated, and open-ended to elicit as much information as possible. They also have to be grouped logically so that the interviewee can easily follow the progression of ideas or chronology. If the purpose of the interview is to stimulate the narrator's memories, the interviewer should start with easy, personal, non-controversial background questions that elicit broad answers, and progress to more controversial topics after a relationship has been established. In fact, sensitive topics should be left to the last part of the interview, when the respondent is more relaxed and comfortable.

After some interviews have been conducted, the researcher may modify the guideline or single questions in order to take into account new themes or to control hypotheses emerging from the initial interviews. The latter was the case in one of the authors' pieces of research on the micro-mobilization into the Republican Movement in the early 1970s (Bosi 2012). Initially there were many themes that interested the researcher. In the central part of the research process, also because of the information gathered in the initial interviews, a more limited range of themes started to emerge, concentrating on three main paths of micro-mobilization among those who joined the PIRA. In the final interviews, attention focused on checking with respondents the emerging interpretations on these three paths. The use of oral history interviewing progressed then from an initial exploratory type of technique to a more deductive one. With the development of initial hypotheses, later interviews were less oriented to investigating the emerging narratives than to seeking confirmation for the hypotheses developed.

In the research done by the same author on the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland, the emergence of new themes in the initial interviews led to modifications in the interview guideline. The initial interviews showed a strong internal competition between different organizations and groups within the same movement, a characteristic which had not emerged with this importance from archival documents. A quote from an interview with Bernadette Devlin, one of the leaders of the movement, is particularly revealing in this sense:

I think that the Civil Rights Movement was a very broad phenomenon that resulted from the faults of the precedent experiences. We look at it as a homogeneous group

sharing the same interests, but it was not like this. In fact, as the things developed, every group went in different ways. . . . The Civil Rights Movement, I think, emerged without a clear direction. People always know what they don't want, but nobody seems to start the journey saying what they want to do. And then I think that the Civil Rights Movement didn't know what it actually wanted. And therefore all its constituent parts went about getting what they wanted and they all wanted different things, and the balance of power shifted between them as they went along (Bosi's interview, 29 July 2003).

In the face of this and similar affirmations contained in the initial interviews, the interview guideline was redesigned in order to further investigate the internal conflicts within the movement which originally had not been central to the inquiry.

The place where the interview is to be conducted is also an important aspect. Researchers should leave the choice of the setting to the respondent. This contributes to the interviewees feeling comfortable talking about their past.

At the beginning of each interview, it is fundamental to clearly explain the purposes of the interview, the topics in which the researcher is interested, the depth of the responses the researcher is seeking, the use of the recording device. The interviewer should be patient with stretches of silence, as the narrator may need time to recollect his/her memoirs. Moreover, he/she should elicit opinions and feelings by asking "why" and "how" questions. At the same time, as we have already said, the interviewee should be left free to engage with the topic. For this reason, the interviewer does not need to strictly follow the sequence on the guideline: it is not necessary to ask every question or to ask the questions in exactly the same order. At the end of each interview, the respondents should be asked whether they have anything to add, and they should be invited to comment on their experience with the interview.

TRANSCRIBING AND ANALYZING

Transcription is an interpretative process in which the tone of voice, the intonation, and the breathing of the interviewee are lost. When transcribing we need to change as little of the narrative as possible. The interviewee's word choice (including grammar) and speech patterns should be retained in order to keep the flavor of the interview. As Portelli suggests, the risk in correcting too much is to lose "the emotional content of speech down to the supposed equanimity and objectivity of the written document" (1991, 48). However, any editorial intervention made in the transcription should be explicit. Before relying exclusively on the transcript, it is important to listen again and again to the recording of the interview, because each time new insights may emerge.

In the transcription, the face-to-face conversation becomes abstracted and gets decontextualized. Therefore, regardless of the importance of the transcriptions, researchers should go back repeatedly to the recording of the interviews in order to control the decisions made while transcribing.

Researchers should not wait to have collected all the interviews planned, before starting to analyze them. Even during the interviews some initial analysis should take place: asking the respondent to clarify an answer is already a first step. For the analysis of the information gathered, researchers should develop a coding scheme, connecting particular words with a set of analytical categories, in order to gain a deeper knowledge about the content of multiple interviews.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Considering that oral history interviewing can offer deep insights into subjective experiences, this is one of the few techniques of data collection in which historians are confronted with the ethical considerations of working with live subjects. An ethical issue connected with oral history is the emotional pain our questions cause the interviewee. In such a situation, the interviewer should build a context that makes the interviewee understand that there is no intention to harm him/her. Several such moments came up in interviews with former IRA members, for instance when the interviewee was asked to reflect about his/her time spent in jail, about the victims provoked by his/her violent tactics, or about the loss of close friends or relatives caused by the British Army. Most of the time, interrupting the interview for a few minutes works as a form of respect for the privacy of the interviewee.

Oral history methods may not only supplement existing archival records, but also create new ones where none previously existed. For this reason, historical archives have started to collect and preserve recorded interviews for future generations. This practice poses ethical issues, however, going beyond the scientific problems (not dissimilar to those found with other archival data), when archived interviews are consulted with quite different intentions from those tackled in the original interview and in a different social and historical context (Mauthner, Parry, and Backett-Milburn 1998; Thompson 2000). In fact, we should be conscious of the ethical problem that we risk revealing information that might be harmful to the interviewee. In extreme cases, suppressing those statements might be the only solution, if they do not prove to be of any real historical significance. In any case, the interviewer should protect confidential sources of information in order to defend the interviewee from harm. An extreme case of a confidential source is, for example, Boston College's "Belfast Project" in 2011, an oral history project designed to interview 40 former republican and loyalist militants on the Northern Ireland

conflict. Here, the Police Service of Northern Ireland has requested to see the material held in the archive relating to the involvement of the PIRA in the death and disappearance of Jean McConville in 1972, despite the fact that the interviewees were given a guarantee that the material would be classified and not made accessible without their consent until after their death. That agreement was challenged by the Northern Ireland police on the basis of the UK–US Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. This incident triggered a major debate over research confidentiality being under attack from the authorities for security reasons (Palys and Lowman 2012; Lowman and Palys 2013).

Concluding Remarks: Interdisciplinary Benefits of Historical Methodologies

Considering historical approaches can provide additional input for social movement research beyond the recovering of single protest events and movements of the past. Archival research in particular, by its very practice, provides a sense about the embeddedness of single past protests and movements in time and place, confronting researchers more deeply and directly with aspects of process, context, sequence, and timing than other methods. The analysis of archival records can also teach us to treat sources as suspect and to pay attention to the social construction of knowledge—that is, to why, how, and under what conditions primary sources were created and to their authenticity.

Oral history, instead, has the ability to gather information largely hidden from documentary sources. In doing this it allows us to discover less about, for example, events of protest than about their meaning to the individual concerned. This can sharpen the eye of the social movement researcher on the subjectivity of voices from the past and can help to reflect on the contingency and fluidity of memory. In addition, oral histories allow us to assess variation among social movement respondents, for example by interviewing militants who have mobilized at different times (Bosi 2012). Finally, oral history, as historical methods in general (Clemens and Hughes 2002), is particularly helpful for studying biographical long-term outcomes of former social movement activists.

In making use of historical approaches, social scientists should also consider the differences between history and their own discipline. Differently from the social sciences, history is concerned with explaining specific events and phenomena, locating them meaningfully in time and place relative to other times and places, and not with developing general theories (idiographic vs nomothetic knowledge) (Tilly 2006; Goldthorpe 1991). If historians could

fruitfully employ social science theories for interpretive purposes, social scientists could benefit from considering the historians' close reconstruction of cases and skepticism towards theoretical explanations applicable to all cases. In addition, social scientists could learn from historians to look beyond short-term explanations by taking time into serious consideration (Bosi 2007). Discussing, in particular, the repertoires of claim-making performances and the signaling systems of social movement, Charles Tilly (2006, 433) has argued that every significant political phenomenon lives in history and requires historically grounded analysis for its explanation.

These observations can lead to a critique of the presentist focus of many social scientists.²² Privileging the present may make sense in terms of policy relevance, but it becomes far more difficult to justify such a bias when it comes to building theory. One might argue, too, that it is only after some time has passed, when the archives are opened, and when activists are prepared to talk candidly in oral history interviews, that we can get the necessary information to make a more mature academic assessment of social movements.

■ NOTES

1. Just to name a few of the more representative works: McAdam 1982; Tilly 1986, 1995, 2004; Morris 1984; Tarrow 1989; della Porta 1995; d'Anjou 1996; Robnett 1996; Franzosi 1998; Rochon 1998; Klatch 1999; Luders 2010.
2. For their comments on previous versions of this chapter, we thank Donatella della Porta, Niall O'Dochartaigh, Claudia Verhoeven, and Lorenzo Zamponi. Particularly as we did not always follow the advice we were given, any failings remain solely ours.
3. Historians also use other primary sources, in particular printed sources and newspapers that are not necessarily to be found in archives, which we do not take into account in this chapter for reasons of space. For insightful reading on these, we suggest Barber and Peniston-Bird (2009).
4. Documents on appraisal policies and best practices can be found on the websites of the major state archives, like the US National Archives or the British Public Record Office.
5. Cuts in funding in recent times have led to considerations of further reducing the percentage of records designated for permanent storage. In the German federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, models were developed to keep only 1 percent of the records generated by the state every year, without endangering the exemplary character of the selection (Bacia and Leidig 2006, 171).
6. Burkhardt 2006a; Blouin and Rosenberg 2011, 203ff. Already today, parts of the data of the Apollo program are no longer readable because the computers, operating systems, and programs of that time are no longer available or data were not transferred to newer systems (see the article "Archiv" in the German Wikipedia).
7. According to its website, the selection of records for the archive of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich (Germany) is determined by the consideration of what will be the future emphasis of contemporary history research.
8. Between the fall of 1999 and February 2006, more than 55,000 pages had been reclassified, many dating back more than 50 years. An audit indicated that more than one-third

- of the records withdrawn since 1999 did not contain sensitive information (see the article “U.S. reclassification program” in the English Wikipedia).
9. As the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen remarked in the mid-nineteenth century, what you find in archives is not “history,” but the daily state and administrative business in all its unsavory breadth, which is as much history as the many-colored blobs on a palette are a painting. Quoted in Oexle 2000, 94.
 10. The document in question is reproduced in Donno 2001, 85.
 11. Specific guides on archival holdings concerning new social movements are rare. For the Italian movements of the 1960s/70s, see Grispigni and Musci 2003. An updated version of this publication can be found on the website of the Basso foundation (<www.fondazionebasso.it>; accessed March 23, 2014). For a guide to the holdings of the archives of new social movements in Germany, see Hüttner 2003 and the web-publication “Neue Soziale Bewegungen. Archive von unten” (<<http://archiv.twoday.net/stories/126758/>>; accessed March 23, 2014).
 12. Other material in state archives of potential interest to social movement scholars may be contained in collections donated by private individuals, firms, or organizations, or acquired by the archives as a supplement of their holdings.
 13. For detailed discussions of the interpretation of different text genres, see Dobson and Ziemann 2009.
 14. Data collected and elaborated by Herbert Reiter; police figures taken from Geheimes Staatsarchiv Berlin, I HA Rep. 77, Tit. 2513, Nr. 2, Vol. 3 (f. 133, 157ff., 245ff.); Vol. 4 (f. 40ff., 109ff, 241ff.); Vol. 5 (f. 73ff., 175ff., 233ff.); Vol. 6 (f. 8ff, 54ff., 79ff., 169ff, 228ff, 263ff.); Vol. 7 (f. 30ff., 162); Landesarchiv Berlin, A Pr. Br. Rep. 030, Nr. 15892 (f. 191ff) and Nr. 15893 (f. 155ff.).
 15. As an example, see the *ca.* 20,000 reports produced between 1892 and 1914 by the Hamburg police on conversations in workers’ pubs, which were filed under the title “Berichte ohne Wert” (Worthless Reports) (Evans 1989; 1990).
 16. For examples concerning Germany, see Bacía and Leidig 2006, 167. This does not mean that there are no established institutions collecting material on new social movements. For the description of a recent collection drive, see Gledhill 2012.
 17. Bacía and Leidig 2006, 168. The “about us” section of the website of “Papiertiger—archiv & bibliothek der sozialen bewegungen,” one of the biggest German free archives, describes the function of the archive as a sort of memory for the Left, offering to today’s initiatives a point of reference with earlier experiences and thus enabling theoretical and practical continuity of political action that is difficult to establish in any other way because of the specific structures of movements.
 18. In February 2009, the association of German archivists established a working group on the conservation of new social movement records, with the aim of improving communication between the different types of archives and making the public more conscious of the importance of free archives. Established institutions seem to participate more often in the working group—according to the association, because the material conditions under which many free archives are forced to work do not permit continuous participation (<<http://www.vda.archiv.net/arbeitskreise/ueberlieferungender-neuen-sozialen-bewegungen.html>>; accessed March 23, 2014).
 19. At least the major movement archives give information on their holdings on their websites and are increasingly engaged in making their holdings digitally accessible.

20. See Schmitz (2007) on a project to archive the web presence of German political parties.
21. On the European Social Forum, see <<http://www.fse-esf.org>>; <http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Archivo_15M>; <<http://icaatom-15M.xsto.info>> (accessed March 23, 2014) on the indignados, see <<http://archivosol15m.wordpress.com/about/>> (accessed March 23, 2014).
22. We want to thank Niall O'Dochartaigh for having pointed out this specific aspect.

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7 Participant Observation

Philip Balsiger and Alexandre Lambelet

How Participant Observation Changes our View on Social Movements

Participant observation and ethnography are not the most common methods in social movement studies.¹ But quite curiously, it is probably because early social movement scholars observed and especially because they took part in social movements that this field of research has seen its main paradigm changes. Consider, for instance, Doug McAdam's (2002) reflections on his early career as a social movement scholar: "My first exposure to the academic study of social movements came in 1971 when, much to my surprise, the professor in my Abnormal Psychology class devoted several weeks to a discussion of the topic. I say 'surprise' because, as an active participant in the anti-war movement, it certainly came as news to me that my involvement in the struggle owed to a mix of personal pathology and social disorganization. But, reflecting the dominant theories of the day, those were the twin factors emphasized in the course."

Because Doug McAdam was himself an activist, the gap between the theories he was taught in college and the practices he had experienced and observed as a participant in social movements was so huge that he would turn his back on the "collective behavior" theories and work on the organizational and strategic dimensions of protest. And McAdam was not alone. By experiencing mobilizations, researchers have taken some of the most important steps in our comprehension of what social movements are. Gamson (1975, 134) pointed out that at this time, many of the future movement scholars were active participants in the student uprisings of the sixties: "They marched on picket lines to boycott chain stores that discriminated or went to the South to work on voter registration; they organized teach-ins and marched against the war in Vietnam; they organized rent strikes or sit-ins for open enrollment, elimination of ROTC, or many other specific issues. And if they didn't actively participate, they talked to many who did."

Properly speaking, Doug McAdam did not do "participant observation." We cannot speak of participant observation in his or other similar cases because participation preceded studying the movement and was not the

method they used for their analysis. But their insights built on three core aspects that together can define what participant observation is:

1) *Collecting “firsthand” data*: by comparison with older researchers who did not take part in any mobilizations, McAdam and the others went to the field. And this is what defines, at best, what doing participant observation means. Indeed, in cultural anthropology, the first discipline to use participant observation as a method of research, it is this idea of “firsthand activity” that moved the discipline from an activity done in libraries to the scientific and modern form of anthropology based on field research.² Moving the use of participant observation from anthropology to sociology (and the whole of the social sciences), Park (1915) and Whyte (1943) were also convinced that a better knowledge and understanding of societies and cultural scenes required scholars “to get out of their armchairs [or in today’s technological world, turn off their computer and statistical programs] and get the seat of their pants dirty.” This revolution has affected the entire domain of research in social movements: for instance, in our understanding of what a crowd is, systematic and empiric observation, as in McPhail’s studies (1991), has allowed research to produce new theories based on empirical data that go beyond the normative and prescriptive theories on democracy that informed the theories of collective behavior.³ Historically or epistemologically, participant observation is a *prerequisite of any theorization*, as Levi-Strauss (1963) put it. Thus, collecting firsthand data entails the idea that progress in social movement theory needs to originate in a deep interaction between firsthand data and existing theory.

2) *Moving the observation scale*: McAdam, getting out of his armchair and experiencing protest also moved the observation scale from the meso- and macro-level of collective behavior theories towards a focus on the actions and interactions of individuals. Doing fieldwork and participant observation is useful when one is interested in what people do and in understanding the meaning they give to their actions, as in Geertz’s thick description (1973) of social reality. If you want to be able to distinguish between boys who are blinking or winking—as in Geertz’s famous example—you need very fine-grained information. Therefore, doing participant observation aims at acquiring a deep knowledge of the social community and the individuals one studies (Bray 2008, 305); it entails adapting to a local area and culture, and it requires evolving within the community of people one is studying over an extended period of time in order to gain a close and intimate familiarity with them and their practices. It wants to get an indigenous view of the alliances, conflicts, and the different goals and strategies of actors in a movement.

3) *Experiencing*: if “inquiring” could be the label for interviewing and “examining” the label for archival research, “experiencing” seems an especially appropriate label for drawing attention to what is gained through

participant observation (Wolcott 1999, 46). Indeed, the purpose (or essence) of participant observation, from Malinowski (1922) to today, is to view and to understand events through the perspective of the people one studies. Participant observation is thus a technique of research where the incorporation of the researcher into the group he or she wants to study is a fundamental element. Researchers take part in the same situation in order to understand the contradictions, the stakes, and the social expectations that people being studied experience. The idea is that the best way to understand what people do, mean, think, or believe in is to be as close as possible to them. As Eliasoph (2011, 262) notes, we only grasp people's multiple binds when we try to do their activities ourselves, as best as we can. Participant observation is thus not just a "technique," but an encompassing and intellectually consistent program and research strategy.

These three elements are at the heart of what participant observation is: ethnographers (that is, researchers doing participant observations) are convinced that a deeper understanding of social life can be produced by *methodologically controlled participation and observation*. Participation and observation conducted with reflexivity, combined with other methods for triangulation, produce data that are confident enough for extrapolation. Reflexivity on the location of the self in the research is, in this process, an essential requirement of ethnographic practice (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Reflexivity means not only being explicit about the political, social, and personal characteristics of the researcher, but also recognizing the constructed nature of the research itself. During the research process, an awareness of the place one occupies in the field helps the researcher to better understand how the group he or she is studying works. A reflexive appreciation and description of our own location in the research process and our impact on it therefore adds critical appreciation of validity of the results that is required in ethnographic research.

Having proposed a first description and definition of participant observation, this chapter aims at presenting this method and offering a practical guide to doing participant observation in social movements. Many researchers use participant observation without making it the central piece of their methodology: attending some meetings to get in touch with activists, making observations before and after interviews, or using it in the preliminary phases of their research. Others give more importance to ethnographic methods or rely mostly on them. The presentation here will be useful for any kind of recourse to ethnography; those researchers who only use participant observation very sporadically in their research design can also benefit from a discussion of the method's core concepts and debates in order to use it more consciously in their research and enhance the heuristic value of data gathered through observation.

Using examples from our own research (Lambelet 2011, 2013, 2014; Balsiger 2014a, 2014b) and from other studies, we will guide the reader through the

different stages of a typical research using participant observation, focusing on the discussion of the numerous methodological choices and problems researchers typically encounter when doing participant research on social movements. As we will see, there is not one type of participant observation, but many different kinds. But before we turn to the practical aspects, we want to briefly point to some of the main insights participant observation has contributed to social movement studies.

Contributions of Participant Observation to Social Movement Research

OBSERVING ELEMENTARY FORMS OF COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

Using different degrees of participation, movement scholars using ethnographic methods have revealed aspects of collective action that are difficult to grasp with other methods.

First, observation has proved very useful for a systematic enquiry of the elementary forms of collective behavior. Studies in this vein use observation to systematically describe forms of collective behavior such as demonstrations (McPhail 1991; Schweingruber and McPhail 1999) or sit-ins (Lofland and Fink 1982), but are not interested in comprehending the points of view of the people who protest. McPhail (1991, 164–74) observed dozens of demonstrations, classifying and counting the behaviors to answer questions such as “Of all the actions in which two persons in temporary gatherings could engage, in which ones do they engage, with what frequency, and to what extent? How do collective actions vary by space and time within demonstrations?” The method used by McPhail and other similar studies is limited to observation and does not include participation; the goal is not to learn anything from participation, but to develop systematic tools that could also be adaptable, for example, for coding demonstrations on television news reports.

OBSERVING THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSIONS OF PROTEST

If McPhail and some other researchers are observing elementary forms of collective behavior, participant observation can also help grasp the meanings and symbolic dimensions of protest or protest-related events. Studies using participant observation have shown that protest is always also a *mise-en-scène*, an often carefully crafted presentation of public images. When observing meetings of seniors’ organizations, Lambelet (2014), was thus attentive to

the symbolic dimension of events, asking questions like: “Who is on the stage and who isn’t? Who do the leaders thank and who not? What kind of leisure activities are coupled with political activities?” Tactics and protest events aim at performing one’s collective identity; an apparently similar action will be performed in very different ways depending on what organizations are behind it. The “Women and Cancer Walk” organized by the feminist strand of cancer activists looks very different from the “Race for the Cure” organized by early detection activists belonging to a different “culture of action” (Klawiter 2008, chaps 5 and 6). In a similar perspective, Marin (2001) pointed at the importance of order in demonstration marches as a mechanism for apprehending the various “messages” that the organizers of the event are seeking to transmit: “These often complex messages are conveyed not by the groups or individuals participating in the cortege, but by reciprocal relations among those groups or individuals in the moving volume that constitutes the cortege. Thus there are key places and rows: the beginning, the middle, the end; there are also significant positions: before . . . after . . . in the same row as . . . surrounded by. . .” (Marin 2001, 45).

BREAKING DOWN THE ILLUSION OF HOMOGENEITY

One of the main insights of participant observation of social movements is certainly their revealing of the great heterogeneity of all movements and movement groups. By moving the observation scale, ethnographic studies have constituted a bulwark against the tendencies of more meso- or macro-oriented methods to homogenize and reify social movements. Such apparently self-evident categories as what movement a group belongs to become fragile when one follows groups closely. In Blee’s ethnographic study on small and emerging activist groups in Pittsburgh, for instance, she shows how the fluidity of emerging groups “makes it difficult to label them, to know what any one is ‘a case of’” (Blee 2012, 6). Opening up the black box of organizations and taking seriously all its aspects thus leads us to see the diversity within a social movement organization (Vitale 2011). The observation of senior organizations showed that people with different characteristics occupied different roles, revealing that there are many ways to be a member of this kind of organization and that what one retiree does when attending meetings can be completely different from what others do (Lambelet 2014). Participant observation also showed that these organizations are less a place to defend pensioners’ interests than places where the various people find different good reasons to get involved in various activities. Within and between particular groups, careful observation can reveal subtle distinctions of socioeconomic status. Observing choices of clothing, hairstyle, type

and amount of jewelry, leisure time activities, speech and language patterns, television program preferences and so on, are ways to apprehend indicators of socioeconomic situation and differences within and across groups. Perhaps “the particular contribution of ethnographers is an understanding of how power is embedded and contested in relationships, how subjectivities are constructed and resisted, and how collective meanings are imposed and reinvented” (Thayer, 2005).

HIGHLIGHTING NON-PUBLIC ASPECTS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES

Great parts of social movement research concern the public actions—in particular the protest events—of movements. One of the contributions of participant observation is to show all the aspects that take place offstage, behind the scenes, before and after protest actions. This attention to the “off” is particularly helpful for studying the strategic decision-making processes of groups, as it allows researchers to see not only the tactics actually used, but also the debates around the adoption of tactics, the options that are pursued but eventually dismissed, and so on. Ethnographers have the possibility to follow these processes as they are taking place, showing that they are not simple reactions to external conditions. In the case of an animal rights group taking up a campaign against foie gras, Blee’s (2012) observation of meetings reveals that groups “formulate and reformulate their reactions—along with their strategies, tactics, and senses of themselves as political actors—over time. Even when (the group in case) took actions it had done before, it didn’t do so in a robotic fashion” (Blee 2012, 50). Studying anti-sweatshop activism, Balsiger (2014a) describes how a tactical innovation was first introduced into the repertoire of a campaign. Participant observation allowed this process-in-the-making to be grasped, and to understand from within the group what created the appeal of this tactic and what provoked its subsequent dismissal. More generally, there are aspects of movements that are never publicly uttered because they are fluid, informal, or perhaps unconscious for the people studied. As Plows (2008, 1524), working on environmental activism in the UK, says: “It could be argued that ethnography has particular relevance for the study of social movements and social mobilization, being on the ground to accurately capture fluid, shifting conditions. Such methods enable the researcher to trace developing mobilization patterns in embedded social contexts; identifying key issues, such as the way social actors are framing the stakes of engagement, in circumstances where visible protest activity is often the tip of an iceberg.”

LOOKING FOR “MEANINGS” THROUGH THE COLLECTION OF “SPEECH-IN-ACTION”

Ethnographic researchers working on politicization or on activism have also revealed the importance of implicit meanings (or “practices,” “cultures of commitment,” or “perspectives”) that enable and constrain what activists can do together. These implicit meanings constitute the boundaries of what groups can do and speak about; they are the basis of different group styles that characterize their culture of interaction (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). By paying attention to implicit meanings, one can see how movement groups constitute “forums” to the extent that they allow interactional space for critically reflexive discussions apart from strategic concerns. Such meanings are hard to discern with methods other than participant observation, because activists may not discuss them readily in an interview. Participation gives access to such interactions and words that the researchers have not inquired about: to “speech-in-action” (Sanjek 1990, 212).

REVEALING GAPS BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICES

Looking at the public statements and frames used by SMOs shows their claims and ideologies. Participation can allow us to go behind these public stances to look at how movements operate day-to-day and can give insights into the possible gaps between what they say and what they do. For instance, researchers often ignore gender or age lines of division within movements, presenting them as “gender and age neutral.” However, these dimensions are a crucial factor of collective action at the macro level of political opportunities and contexts, but also at the micro level of the logics of individual commitment and the division of activist labor (Fillieule 2008; Lambelet 2013). Participant observation can, for instance, reveal gender dynamics in movement groups fighting for gender equality. Another example of possible gaps are the participatory ideologies shared by many of the movements of the 1960s or the global justice movement, and the practices of decision making they employ (della Porta 2013). Ethnographic research can closely observe the power dynamics at play in such contexts and, for instance, show that structureless organizations contain their own forms of inequality (Freeman 1970).

SOCIALIZATION AND ROLE TAKING

Socialization and role taking are processes by which people learn to be activists and members of social movements. In a “successful” socialization process,

people are supposed to “become” their roles, but this process is never easy. People may never quite become their roles (Broqua 2005), but instead exit or transform the organization. Looking at the process of role taking informs us on the capacity and skills people have to learn, practically and in terms of state of mind. And if the role shapes and patterns both action and actor, if new activists have to learn their new roles, then at the same time people can resist and reshape their roles and transform the organizations in which they are involved. The process of role taking reveals in a new light how groups evolve: sometimes “what begins as a peace group can morph into an environmental group with the change of a few members” (Blee 2012, 6).

LEARNING THROUGH PARTICIPATING

Finally, participant observation gives the researcher the possibility of reflecting on the personal and behavioral transformations one makes through one’s experience. It “challenges, even if it does not entirely overcome the (researching) subject (researched)–object binary” (Juris and Kasnabish 2013, 5). Few researchers are really doing *participation* in their fieldwork, and even fewer explicitly speak about what they have specifically learned from this participation. Eliasoph (2011, 262) says that she only grasped the organizers’ multiple binds when she tried to do their jobs herself, as best as she could. When interacting with the people we study on the field, we do many things: we discuss, we make jokes, we play, we look around, we eat, we love, and we hate, as Olivier de Sardan (1995) put it. And we are not only *looking at* something, but also *seeing* a lot of things: all these observations are “recorded” somewhere (in our subconscious, our “self”). These are all elements that help us to be able to function unobtrusively (or in a culturally competent manner). Chatting, gossiping, having drinks with informants are not “outside” the study. It is on such occasions that we learn how to act in the correct way, that we learn what is the ordinary life of the people studied. All these observations, as informal or unconscious as they are, are very important and useful for ethnographic research: “Your body remembers when your brain does not” (Eliasoph 2011, 261). For some authors, like Melucci (1996), it is impossible to really understand a social situation if you only observe it: you have to act and be part of it.

Doing Fieldwork

There is not one single type of participant observation, but a continuum from participation to observation. Indeed, as Wolcott wrote (1999, 45), the

ambiguity of what participant observation is can make the problem of defining it an inviting topic in the never-ending discourse on method. He therefore advises neophyte researchers to describe, with far more detail than is prompted by the phrase itself, precisely what they intend to do, giving specific examples of the kind of data they believe they will need and the procedures by which they intend to obtain them. In this spirit, the remainder of this chapter discusses the main issues and questions one has to address when using participant observation in social movement analysis.

What Is a “Field”?

An ethnographer’s field is “the natural, nonlaboratory setting or location where activities in which a researcher is interested take place” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 70). The notion of field contains the idea that the researcher has to move to a specific, geographically and socially located space. In classic ethnographic studies, researchers leave their habitual social environment behind and enter a different social world. Here, the field is seen as a totality that embraces all aspects of social life and has a certain closure. As ethnographers, we are expected to spend as much time as possible in the field over an extended period in order to gain familiarity with the group we study. We learn their language, the rules guiding relationships, cultural patterns, shared meanings and values, and so on.

But often, this unity of space and social bounds is not a given (O’Reilly 2009). In social movement research, a field may be a specific, locally situated event such as protest camps for a G-20 summit, but it may also be an activist group that only meets once every month, several groups belonging to the same movement, or an online forum where activists post comments and discuss. What a field is therefore depends on one’s research question, and in many cases the field does not resemble the classic idea of a local setting. Most participant observation in social movements thus implies forms of “multi-sited ethnography” (Marcus 1995). Here, the field is mobile: the researcher follows an object across different settings. For instance, Brooks’ (2007) research on the global anti-sweatshop movement implied participant observation in Indian factories where textiles are produced, and of unionists and movement activists in North America conducting campaigns on behalf of those textile workers.

The multi-locality of participant observation often poses a challenge in terms of time resources. It is difficult to conduct participant research on several sites at the same time, especially if the sites are located far apart. Because of professional constraints, one does not have an unlimited amount of time, and researchers are (unfortunately) often in a hurry, which makes immersion

problematic. For some authors, spending extended time in the field is necessary even in multi-sited research; Klawiter's (2008) participant observation, for instance, went on for four years. Others—like Ulf Hannerz, who has theorized multi-sited ethnography—take a more pragmatic stance and argue for an “art of the possible” to fit fieldwork into lives (2003, 212). The use of interviews can be a way to “make up” for the lack of time for participant observation, especially when one has already done observation on other sites.

Movements are usually not active 24/7; rather, one observes meetings and public actions that take place every once in a while. Although to understand activism, we may want to observe activists in all their life-spheres and could, for instance, opt to move in with some of them, we often focus on their role as activists. Fields are thus not only multi-sited, they are also non-continuous. We see the activists at a meeting, maybe have a drink with them afterwards, but then everyone goes home and we do not see them until the next event. Some periods are more eventful than others, such as when a big protest is staged; others may be very calm. Contrary to other research objects, such as the workplace, the time spent in the field may thus be much shorter, simply because the activity of the group one studies is quite limited. This can certainly make it easier to do participant observation, provided one is willing to work after 5 p.m. or on weekends from time to time: participant observation does not usually fit neatly into office hours. But the irregularity of activities and the difficulty of foreseeing them and therefore of planning fieldwork can also be a challenge. When studying social movements through participant observation, it is important to have the freedom to jump on the occasions that the quirks of the field create.

Hannerz points at another factor that often makes interviews necessary to complement participant observation. “Settings of modernity” often involve activities that are “monotonous, isolated, and difficult to access” (Hannerz 2003, 211). Is it possible to use participant observation when in one's field, people designing movement campaigns work individually at a computer? It is not a coincidence that much of the ethnographic research on movements focuses on public actions or on meetings. But activists may use other tactics that are more difficult to observe. When Balsiger (2014b) studied the anti-sweatshop movement, it turned out that its campaigns were mainly conducted by a NGO employee working at his desk. Unless being hired as an intern, it was very difficult to do participant observation in this setting. And also one of the main activities of the group of local volunteers was difficult to study through participant observation: they did research to compile information for an “ethical shopping map,” usually individually and from their homes. For this reason, the research on the process of tactical innovation (Balsiger 2014a) used interviews to complement observations from meetings. In “individualist” settings, ethnography thus encounters particular challenges. In the case of the recently developed “online ethnography” (see Coleman 2013), those challenges are

often particularly present. But online settings also contain many forms of interaction for the study of which participant observation may be very useful.

Finally, multi-site ethnography also poses questions of sampling. What sites do we select, and according to what criteria? Why this group rather than that one? Even if we aim to cover all emerging activism at a certain time and place (Blee 2012), or on a given cause (Klawiter 2008), we still have to choose. Where do we spend more time, where less? These are important questions, as they have consequences for potential claims of generalizability, in particular. They usually imply difficult choices. The emulation of strategies from quantitative research seeking statistical inference, such as random sampling or the search for an average and “representative” site, is not adapted to the specific logic of qualitative research (Small 2009). Instead, it is better to choose sites according to theoretical criteria, not aiming at representativeness but at diversity. When studying a movement campaign, for instance, we might be interested in the different scales in which it takes place, and pick a local group, do observation in the headquarters of the national campaign, and look at the campaign’s transnational coordination. The first site we study often gives us a better idea of what aspects matter, and we can then sample for range. When comparing different sites, we can also use criteria of comparative research and choose cases that differ on a few theoretically interesting factors, for instance the gender composition of activist groups. We may want to vary cities, age of groups, composition, the causes being fought for, and so on, in order to find more robust causal explanations.

How to Get in Contact with the Field

The first thing we have to do is to gain access to our field, a step that needs to be negotiated. This can be a tricky task, and it is important to take the first steps carefully: a good first impression can help create good relations on the field. When we try to gain access to our field, we need to think about three questions. Whom do we contact and thus associate with? In what kind of relation of exchange do we find ourselves with the field? And how do we present ourselves? Whom to contact, and with whom to be associated when we first do our participant observation, can have important consequences for research. It can determine what we will and will not be able to see, where we will be taken, and which sites we will not penetrate. Within any group, there are power struggles of which we are often unaware when entering the field; members of the group who have marginal positions will often be the first ones to be attracted to the observer, hoping to promote their interests through this association (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 72). If one is interested in power dynamics and struggles in movements, being

associated with a particular side in an internal dispute is a problem. In an ethnographic study on the response of resident surgeons to reforms of working hours in hospitals, Kellogg (2011) figured out early on that residents were choosing sides in a fight. She therefore “tried to be careful not to affiliate predominantly with either reformers or defenders” (Kellogg 2011, 15). Moreover, the status of the subjects with whom we associate within the hierarchy of the group is crucial. Generally speaking, it can be quite easy to move up the social ladder, but the opposite is often impossible: one is then suspected of betraying confidences. You have to control your associations and be strategic about it, as Goffman (2002) put it: “If you get seen in any formal or informal conversation with members of a superordinate group, you’re dead as far as the subordinate group is concerned” (Goffmann 2002, 152) Following similar advice, Kellogg started following first-year residents and dressed like them, thus blending in by also adapting to their clothing style (see also Ollion 2010 on this point).

The question of whom to contact and who to associate with is further complicated by the political dimension that characterizes social movements. Studying social movements means working on organizations that position themselves on specific political issues (see Malthaner 2014 on fieldwork in zones of conflict). If the researcher himself has some kind of (publicly known) political stance or commitment on the issue she studies or a related one, the access to the field can be more difficult. For example, when one takes a clear stance on a particular strategic issue of the movement one studies, it can be difficult to work again on this same movement later on or in another country, because the people you want to observe might be aware of your political preferences. At a time where information is very easily available, we as researchers have to assume that the members of the groups we want to study might look us up online. For very politicized movements, non-conformity with their ideology and strategic choices can be a huge problem.

The second question we need to think about is the kind of relation of exchange we have with our field. For an activist group, welcoming a participant observer can be a logistical and even political inconvenience—they seldom have a lot of time and may also be worried about surveillance (Lichterman 2001). Why should groups agree to this? We need to develop trust with the group we want to study. Luckily, in spite of inconveniences, activist groups are also most of the time very open to research. But even in such a trustful relationship, we often feel the need to give the group something back. This can take many forms. Sometimes, having one more person to stand in the cold rain and distribute pamphlets is much appreciated by small groups who have a hard time mobilizing. We can also volunteer to write minutes in meetings—a task that also has advantages when it comes to taking field notes discreetly. Péchu (2006), doing participant observation with squatters in Paris, offered to write a short history of the movement for

the activists. Often, activists appreciate the presence of researchers among them because it makes them think reflexively about their own practices, and because it can be an opportunity for them to make their voices heard in a different arena.

Finally, we also need to think about how to present ourselves. Most authors would say that there are very few reasons that can justify covert research in social movement studies. Indeed, failing to disclose our identity as researchers raises serious ethical issues and can be problematic at the moment of the publication of our results. As a piece of general advice, it should always be possible to explain the research to the group one studies in a language that can be understood by participants (O'Reilly 2009) and to obtain formal permission. However, the question of covert vs overt research is usually not as clear-cut. There is a continuum between those two poles. After all, the goal of participant research is that the research subjects forget about being studied and “act naturally” (O'Reilly 2009). Newcomers in activist groups may not be aware of our research—do we have to explain it each time, or can we simply assume that the other members of the group will tell them? And if we start studying a group of which we are already part, is there a right moment to “come out”? Finally, we may be open about doing research, but not disclose exactly what our research is about in order to avoid interfering with the setting. For instance, when studying gender dynamics in anarchist or queer groups, one might think it better to be strategic and not to reveal this goal, because activists might otherwise become self-conscious about their behavior. But doesn't this mean that one is betraying the activists' trust? And couldn't it be that they are open about someone studying precisely this aspect? Such questions cannot be easily solved, especially in very politicized contexts. The conditions of access to the field are thus not something that is achieved once and for all, but need to be negotiated over and over in the course of fieldwork (O'Reilly 2009, 6). This also plays out within a broader institutional context: in recent years, professional associations such as the American Anthropological Association or the British Sociological Association have developed ethics codes regulating the transparency of ethnographic research, requiring researchers to follow strict procedures regarding their communication with research subjects, the kind of data they collect, and the use they can make of this data (see also, on this subject, Milan 2014 on ethical issues).

How to Prepare Observations

“Going to the field” for the first time can provoke stage fright. What should one observe? What is important and worthwhile to note down? Is

it possible to prepare observations? Often, scholars distinguish between theory-driven and field-driven participant observation. The latter intends to shed light on a given empirical object, while the former is designed to address a theoretical problem (Lichterman 2001). Field-driven researchers are empiricists who would go to the field without any theoretical ideas, while theory-driven ethnographers want to see if a specific theory “works.” Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) grounded theory is an example of the empiricist approach, while Burawoy’s extended case method (1998) starts from a theoretical questioning. Arguably, most participant observation probably takes place somewhere in between. A defining feature of participant observation is its iterative character (Beaud and Weber 2003). The analysis emerges in the back-and-forth between theoretical reflection and observations: “it begins with a set of connected ideas that undergoes continuous redefinition throughout the life of the study until the ideas are finalized and interpreted at the end” (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, 2). Every researcher, when first entering a new field, has some rudimentary theoretical ideas about what she expects to find or wants to know more about. This can be generated from previous knowledge and experience, from popular wisdom, or from scientific theories.

Sometimes participant observers use an observation *template* that helps in guiding observations. Early field manuals, such as the “Notes and Queries on Anthropology for the use of travelers and residents in uncivilized land” published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874, featured observation lists to make sure one did not forget anything for a systematic description of unknown cultures. It was aimed at amateur observers who would provide information on demand to scholars at a distance. Such pre-established and universal observation templates no longer exist, but one still can only see what one knows or what others have thought about before. Reading the work of other researchers, regardless of what their empirical object is, remains a crucial element of learning how to do observation.

Specific observation templates are still essential, however, when one does multi-sited ethnographic research or, even more so, team ethnography, where researchers collaborate on a common project (Snow et al. 2010). Blee (2012) observed, with the help of students that she trained, 378 events (mostly meetings) by 69 activist groups in Pittsburgh over four years. She wanted her observations to speak to the same general questions of the emergence of activist groups, and therefore conducted “semi-structured” observations based on an observation template that prompted observers, among others, to pay attention to conflicts, emotions invoked or displayed, or talk of problems in the group. The template is reproduced in the methodological annex of the book (Blee 2012, 150–1) and consists of a very broad list of things to write down and stay alert to. Importantly, it was “continually refined over time to

include new issues and address emerging hypotheses” (Blee 2012, 146), thus reflecting the iterative character of participant observation.

When in the Field: Blending in and Observing

When in the field, the participant observer usually wants to blend in and avoid influencing the interactions that are taking place. But is this really possible—won’t a participant observer always, to some extent, alter the relations she is supposed to observe? This is a problem every participant observer faces. But to make things even more complicated, participant observers do not only want to blend in and participate: at the same time, they also want to keep a critical distance and observe. Participating and observing are thus oxymoronic (O’Reilly 2009): while participating means getting absorbed in the field, being part of it, and having empathy with the people studied, observing means stepping back, acting as an outsider, being critical. How do researchers deal with this contradiction that is built into the method?

A participant observer who enters a field as an outsider first faces the challenge of being accepted by the group as one of them. We need to “go native,” and we want our groups to accept us. In his famous thick description of a Balinese cockfight, Geertz (2005, 58) recounts how he and his wife had a hard time getting accepted; they felt like intruders at first and were ignored. Only after a police descent to disperse a cockfight, when Geertz and his wife ran away from the police like everyone else and finally found refuge at the compound of one of the participants of the fight, were they accepted in the village. “Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the center of all attention, the object of a great outpouring of warmth, interest, and, most especially, amusement.” They had become part of the community. Episodes of a similar kind often happen when we study activist groups: particular and unforeseeable events help us to be accepted in a group.

The more time one spends in a field, the more likely it is that we are no longer perceived as outsiders. However, there are often things a researcher cannot change and that will always mark a distance to the groups studied. The social characteristics that define us—age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation—often distinguish researchers clearly and visibly from their field. One of us (Lambelet 2014) studied organizations of senior citizens: it is difficult to blend in as a 25-year-old in a group whose average age is well above 70. Social characteristics influence the relations and interactions between a participant observer and her subjects of study. The people we study may reinterpret the new and unusual research relation into more common terms and make transfers (Fournier 2006): not seeing the ethnographer

as a researcher, but as a potential sexual partner, for instance, or, in the case of the research on senior citizens, as a grandson. It can sometimes be possible to take advantage of these roles—it may help in getting accepted in the group. But the social distance can also be a barrier to knowledge. For a long time, ethnographers have ignored these questions and erected objectivist accounts. But with the reflexive turn, such concerns have come to the center of participant observation research. The analysis of the relationship between the participant observer and the members of the groups she studies is an integral part of research.

Not only social distance and difference need to be addressed: similarities raise questions too. It can sometimes be an advantage to have an insider role, to be already part of the group one studies before starting the research, to share the same social status and worldviews. Condemning the ideology of the group one studies makes it a very demanding task to develop the necessary empathy with research subjects—a core requirement of participant observation. But if we are too close to our field, on the contrary it can be difficult to build up the necessary critical distance. It can provoke personal dilemmas to publish a critical account of a movement to which we are fundamentally sympathetic. Lichterman (2001, 127) offers the sound advice to always keep an analytic lens focused on the group we study, regardless of whether or not we agree with them: “We learn less if we surrender that lens on the notion that we already agree with the group’s cause and therefore understand what they are doing, or we already disagree with the group’s cause and therefore understand—to our chagrin—what they are doing.”

The degree of participation also raises concerns: if we participate too actively in the activist groups we study, are we not exerting too much influence on what we want to observe? In the case of very small groups, this can quickly become a problem. When one of us, Balsiger (2014b), approached a group that had launched a petition against a big sports brand, the group turned out to be composed of only four members; at the second meeting, it became clear that the activists were expecting advice from the researcher on how to improve their campaigning skills. But I felt hardly competent to give advice, and was in addition very reluctant to do so because I did not want to “distort” what I was supposed to observe. On the other hand, I could not simply refuse their demands. I ended up putting them in contact with one of the other groups I was studying, which was more experienced in campaign work. Thus, I served as a broker between two activist groups, and certainly contributed to a development in the field that might otherwise not have happened. As participant observers, we also have responsibilities vis-à-vis the groups we observe, and sometimes this means that we have to do things we would prefer not to do. Questions of how much we should participate animate many ethnographers of social movements. Most of them conclude that actively participating hardly poses problems—the heuristic benefits far outweigh the

difficulties. Participating enables emotional and relational experiences that often prove to be invaluable sources of understanding that are impossible to acquire in other ways.

Different Roles

How much participation is possible depends not only on our personal research strategies, but also on our epistemological approach, research question, the field, and sometimes on other factors. Ethnographers have identified different roles of participant observers (Watt and Scott Jones 2010, 111): the complete observer is detached from the research cohort and does not participate; the observer-as-participant observes for brief periods of time to set the context for interviews or other types of research; the participant-as-observer builds up a relationship that is both friend and neutral researcher; and the complete participant becomes wholly absorbed in the researched community. However, in reality, these different roles are often played simultaneously by the same researcher in the course of a research. On some sites, we only act as observers, whereas on others we engage with the group and participate. Participant observation can be more or less central in a given research design—it can be the core of it or just a means to become more familiar with what we study.

In the field, specific roles can be adopted and serve as vantage points for participant observation. In social movement research, it is usually not a problem to find such a role, especially when one studies activist groups. We can simply be an additional volunteer, a helping hand in the organization of protest events, or take up certain tasks that allow us to talk to many of the activists. It can be more problematic in the case of professional NGOs, which resemble settings for workplace or public administration ethnographies (Huby et al. 2011), or in circumstances where other factors make observation problematic. In an ethnography on anti-imperial protests in Japan, Steinhoff (2007) was not allowed to participate because this would have violated her visa status. Her description of her “observation technique” shows the delicate negotiations involved in field research in finding one’s position and role: “To make it clear that I was an observer and not a participant in the political movement itself (which would have violated my visa status), during street demonstrations I walked on the sidewalk beside the demonstrators (. . .). *In order to maintain good relations with the demonstrators I did not speak to the security police*, but we recognized each other on sight. Aside from the one occasion on which an angry security policeman scolded me for taking pictures of the security police instead of the demonstrators, I was not bothered” (emphasis added) (Steinhoff 2007, 85). The inability to march

with the demonstrators required her to find other ways to signal them that she was “on their side” in order to avoid jeopardizing her good relations with the protestors.

Field Notes

Field notes are the central data collection tool of a participant observer. Because it is impossible to remember everything, it is crucial to take detailed notes every day of fieldwork. Sometimes, it is possible to take notes during observation—for instance, during a meeting it is acceptable to put down some points on a piece of paper. However, one should also be discreet with note taking on the spot because it could be perceived as an intrusion. During fieldwork we therefore need to find a way to (mentally or physically) note the important things we do not want to forget. After fieldwork, it is important to take as much time as we need to write down detailed notes. The sooner the better—while memory is still fresh. The longer we wait, the more we will forget.

But what should we write in our field notes? “Everything that’s important” is not a very useful advice, since writing down everything will take us forever, and we will not know what is important right away (O’Reilly 2009). It certainly takes some practice to know what is “an observation:” the longer we are in a field, the better we know what to take notes of. In the first few days of fieldwork, the best advice is to write down as much as possible. Goffman called it a “freshness cycle:” “The first day you’ll see more than you’ll ever see again. And you’ll see things that you won’t see again. So, the first day you should take notes all the time” (2002, 152). Goffman also encourages writing field notes in a personal tone: since they are not meant to be published as such but constitute “raw data,” they can be written as “fully and lushly” as possible (Goffman 2002). But field notes must also be precise, detailing who said what to whom, and how they said it. Noting *what* happened *when* allows us to be able to reconstruct sequences of action. If one uses an observation template, it is nonetheless important to be alert to other information one finds striking and adding new points to the template.

In addition to written field notes about observations, we can also use recordings, pictures, sketches, or videotapes. In certain circumstances, it can be perfectly acceptable to ask permission to film an event, such as a general assembly of a social movement group or a particular protest event. Such data can allow us more detailed access to what happened during a meeting. In addition, besides taking notes and observing, an ethnographer is also a statistician and an archivist, carefully counting the number of people that attend meetings or protest events, trying to know their composition in terms

of gender, race, age, and so on. We may also collect the materials activists produce (Philipps 2012), such as pamphlets, PowerPoint presentations, announcements, minutes, personal notes, or e-mail communications, and so on. Finally, the various online traces people leave behind are a tempting source—Facebook posts and friendships by individuals or groups, tweets, or Instagram pictures may contain very relevant information on the people we study. In some ways, this use of “big data” is but an extension of traditional methods of triangulation used by ethnographers. But in other ways, because of the sheer amount of information and the privacy issues this kind of data raises, it poses ethical questions that need to be thought through carefully.

The notes one takes are of different kinds. Some are descriptive and relate closely what happened in the field. They are on the *who, what, when, and how* of human activity. But others are more analytical. We do not just write down what we see and hear, but also theoretically interpret and analyze this in a reflexive way. Finally, a third kind of notes are methodological. They are instructions to oneself: what to pay attention to in the future, where to go, whom to contact, and so on. Theoretical notes are the first step to the analysis; they can be thought of as memos or, as one goes up the ladder of abstraction, as codes. Separation of these two levels is important, but we also need to be able to quickly retrieve those observation(s) to which a theoretical note is related. This will be helpful when writing our analysis, as the description will give the necessary thickness to our account.

Leaving the Field

How do we know when we have done enough participant observation and when it is time to leave the field? Duration is a crucial factor of good participant observation. Traditionally, ethnographers estimated that one had to spend at least one year in the field in order to see a full natural cycle and its rites—spring, summer, autumn, winter. But what does that mean when we observe social movements? Duration certainly depends on our research question and the nature of our object. When we are interested in events like world social forums, duration can sometimes be only a few days—although in an ethnographic perspective, one would tend also to look at the preparation of events and at what happens after them—what we have called the non-public side of social movements. If we only observe three days of a public meeting, how can we know whether this was a regular meeting or an exceptional one, due to a specific context? To know when to put an end to fieldwork, ethnographers speak of field saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Olivier de Sardan 1995). For a given research question, the productivity of observations diminishes: for each new day of fieldwork, each additional interview or site, we get

less and less new information. When this point has been reached, fieldwork has been completed. Conversely, this also ideally means that we should not stop fieldwork as long as this point has not been reached: only when the field is saturated can we give a valid account of it. Stopping before, our data may be insufficient, superficial. Of course, this may sometimes interfere with external constraints—usually, we do not have unlimited time to do fieldwork, but have to finish a paper, a dissertation, a book.

Analyzing Data

Doing fieldwork is an iterative process. Analyzing and collecting data are therefore not always temporarily separated. The regular taking of field notes implies constant analytical work, often pointing towards new questions that will be explored through observations and interviews. This back-and-forth means that one needs to be open to the surprises and contingencies of fieldwork. Our initial research interests often get diverted towards other issues that appear more relevant in the contact with the people we study. In our analysis, we might therefore not necessarily take up the question we initially thought was driving the research; instead, participant observation can lead us on hidden tracks and puzzles that were impossible to perceive in advance. When conducting fieldwork and analyzing field notes, we have to be open to this possibility.

In spite of the iterative character of fieldwork, however, there comes a time when we stop doing observation and start writing up our analysis. There is no single and ready-made method of analyzing ethnographic data. It is usually a process that is hidden, part of an implicit know-how that is learnt by practice and is not formalized. It encompasses activities such as coding and re-coding of field notes, creating research puzzles to which our observations can give an answer, developing arguments that build on citations and descriptions from field notes and refining them when writing, and so on. How does one organize the “steaming mass” of data accumulated over a long period of participant observation into a “coherent narrative” (Katz 2002, 64)? How does one put diverse observations pointing in numerous directions into a linear account?

The job of the analyst is to find a logical order to sort all the material you have. Beaud and Weber (2003) suggest as a starting point to write down a descriptive account of the fieldwork. Such an account is descriptive, precise, and honest; it lists the things we have observed, as well as the deficiencies of our observations. In parallel, they incite us to write an account of our own itinerary on the field. Where did we start our observations, and what sites did we observe from there on? To whom did we talk, and when? What were the different roles occupied in the course of fieldwork? Being aware of this

personal trajectory is necessary when reflexively analyzing our data: it helps to contextualize the different encounters and interpretations of settings and events.

The analytical work then means stepping out of the single observations to compare them and find out how they are connected together (Beaud and Weber 2003). In a more theoretically driven approach, this will have started early on and guided our observations all along; if the approach is more field-driven, it will be done mostly after fieldwork is completed. It is best done with some kind of coding system, by putting observations into different thematic folders (and again, has probably started already while doing fieldwork, but needs to be reassessed once all observations have been made). Computer-assisted qualitative analysis can be of help when organizing data and analyzing it. Codes categorize and create links between observations and put order into what we see. The different topics or codes will help us gain an analytical grasp of the story our research is going to tell. Beyond single observations, we thus look for the encompassing themes that speak to theoretical interrogations, develop hypotheses, and propose explanations. Codes are also helpful to organize observations—quotations, conversations, descriptions of settings or of anecdotes—into bits relevant for the different sections or chapters of our research report, paper, or book. In the methodological appendix to her book *Making Volunteers*, Eliasoph reveals that she began her analysis by putting observations into categories; “chapters began as *nothing but* notes that I stuck together for reasons that initially struck me as intuitively right” (2011, 262).

Surprises, enigmas, misunderstandings, paradoxes, or absurd situations often stand at the beginning of compelling ethnographic narrations. What makes us laugh or what makes us feel revolted, is intriguing. The gap between our expectations and what happens in the field can thus reveal an explanation. In our puzzlement about something the group we study takes for granted lies a key to understanding its style that also shapes the tactics it uses (Lichterman 1996). Our astonishment at the absence of visible signs of social movement organizations at a show for ethical fashion triggers the discovery of the different approaches that constitute this field (Balsiger 2012). The art of an ethnographic analysis often consists of producing plausible accounts that draw on such apparently minor anecdotes and observations. But how can we make sure that our accounts are valid and do not just blow out of proportion an insignificant and erroneously interpreted event? What makes it more than our subjective interpretation?

The reflexive nature of the analysis is an essential ingredient for this. The analysis must specify how much time we spent in the field, what roles we played, how we got access to sites, and what relations we built up with the people we studied. It specifies the difficulties we encountered and the iteration of our research questions in the course of fieldwork. It addresses the different

kinds of biases that exist in every research: in particular, our privileged relationship to certain informants, actors, and networks on the field that may have shaped our interpretation and our subjective point of view informed by personal biographies. The reader needs to have these indications in order to understand our relation with the field and to assess the validity of the analysis. We do not want to plead for an excessively self-centered analysis: readers want to learn first and foremost about the social movements we study, not about our own personal experience. Nonetheless, being *methodologically explicit* is indispensable in order to produce valid ethnographic accounts.

A second essential requirement of analysis is the contextualization and triangulation of data (Olivier de Sardan 1995). All observations have to be contextualized. Who speaks, who acts? What is her position within the group, what is his social, economic, cultural capital? Activists do not come from nowhere: they have families, professions, personal biographies. They have also dreams or ideas about who they want to be in ten years' time. This will inform what they do and what they say—for instance, what words they use and how they classify things. Contrary to ethno-methodological approaches in the tradition of Garfinkel (1984), which focus exclusively on the setting of interaction, we think that contexts are crucial and need to be accounted for in the analysis of data produced by participant observation. In addition, this data also has to be cross-checked whenever possible. Here, the analytical work of a participant observer resembles that of a crime investigator or a historian. Like detectives or historians, ethnographers must always seek to do cross-verification of data through different sources. This implies both the points of view of different people we study, and the use of other data than field notes from observation, such as interviews, statistics, or secondary documents. Triangulation is more sophisticated if we deliberately choose our informants because of their position within the group we study and seek out their point of view. Indeed, fieldwork can be explicitly designed to “test” or verify our specific hypotheses and interpretations (Olivier de Sardan 1995). It is the “specific beauty of ethnographic research: you develop your ideas and then go back to the field the next day to challenge them, refine them, make sure they are right, and/or discover variations on themes” (Eliasoph 2011, 262).

These principles of a “fieldwork policy” constitute a safeguard against an analysis entirely submitted to the risk of subjectivity (Olivier de Sardan 1995). A final important requirement, of course, is to let the actors speak. An ethnographic analysis should always be rich in descriptions, in using original material from fieldwork—quotes, bits of conversations, vignettes of scenes and settings. This makes the analysis “varied,” “colorful,” “vivid,” and can be a way to appraise ethnographic research (Katz 2001; 2002). But there is always a tension between too much and not enough analysis. In the former case, the actors of the field are in the background and the researcher monopolizes

speech. In the latter case, the researcher can almost be absent and lets the field speak for itself. A piece of ethnographic analysis needs to find a balance between those two, which also means finding a balance between the voice of the author and those of the people studied. From an epistemological perspective, researchers have the possibility of varying points of view and are thus able to present an analysis that is different from one single viewpoint. At the same time, whenever we transform the voices from our research into a “scientific narrative,” this forces us “to directly confront the partial, situated, ‘non-innocent,’ and deeply constructed nature of the stories one crafts and the knowledge claims one makes” (Klawiter 2008, 299). Does our researcher’s voice have more authority than the points of view of the activists we study, or is it just one view among others? The researcher has the privilege of having the last word, but this also raises important ethical questions and sometimes puts us in an intellectually and ethically challenging position between empathy, responsibility, and respect towards our research subjects, and our goal of critical sociological analysis.

Be Explicit!

Doing participant observation means embracing the idea that taking part in ordinary social situations and interactions allows us to learn about the complexity of things (words, acts, but also causality, significations, and stakes) that coexist and that make possible or shape these social situations. It means accepting that an interest in what actors do and say, as well as in the meaning they give to what they do and say, is indispensable for the comprehension of social phenomena (even though we may know at the same time that actors do not have full awareness of the entire social phenomenon in which they take part, and that we triangulate our participant observation data with other kinds of sources). Participant observation thus means adopting the view that understanding social phenomena is situated somewhere between what people say and what people do—both meanings and actions/practices are important. With regard to other methodologies, which either only use interviews or, on the contrary, only use observation, participant observation looks at what lies between the two: in the adjustments, disjunctions, silences.

The three core aspects that together define participant observation—“collecting firsthand data,” “moving the observation scale,” and “experiencing” (that is, the presence of the researcher)—constitute the strength of the method. At the same time, this presence is also what the method is most criticized for: the researcher’s presence represents, for some, the scientific impossibility of participant observation. Presenting work using ethnographic methods to researchers who do not do ethnography almost certainly leads to questions

on subjectivity, while this issue rarely comes up when discussing other methods. It is perhaps because participant observers are most of the time alone on their field, and reproducibility of the same piece of research seems impossible because “the water never flows twice under the same bridge.” Most of the time, a researcher who studies a particular movement group immediately becomes *the* specialist on it, and few people can contradict his findings if no one is willing to spend the same amount of time in the field. But does this invalidate the method? On the contrary. Nobody today questions the theoretical advances of the refutation of models of personal pathology or social disorganization that was achieved thanks to researchers who used their personal experience of protest and realized that movements were constituted of strategic and organized actors. Participant observation, certainly more than other methods, has been subject to methodological debates aimed at avoiding the subjective bias of researchers. The tools to do this are the classic tools of the social sciences: multiplication of points of view, reflexivity, triangulation, comparison, and so on. Therefore, the difficulty in reproducing research does not say anything about the scientific character of the method. It just makes the entrance cost of this method explicit: doing fieldwork is a long and costly process.

But in spite of the obvious contributions of participation and the importance of methodological debate among practitioners, a doubt seems to persist. Because of the impossibility of reproducing participant observation-based research, we want to propose, to conclude, some ways to diminish as much as possible the doubts on the scientific value of data gathered through participant observation. One possibility would be to take part in a community of researchers working simultaneously on objects or groups that are similar, allowing us to increase the cumulativeness of knowledge on these objects, to confront research and compare it—something which working on very different objects makes much more difficult. The Chicago School was an interesting project from this point of view: many researchers were working on the same social site within a relatively short period of time—the city of Chicago and its urban transformations at the beginning of the twentieth century. Another way to cumulate points of view on the same phenomenon is working in teams, with different researchers working on the same object. This allows us to break with the personal link between a researcher and his field. Blee’s (2012) and Snow et al.’s (2010) studies take this path.

Most of all, it is important to be as explicit as possible in the restitution of one’s work on the different moments of the research, the choices one made, the positions one occupied. And as much as possible, one should follow certain standards of writing when communicating scientific findings to the broad community of researchers. There are certain established standards of scientific evaluation that are commonly used to evaluate research based on participant observation. Trying to resume to young scholars what an ethnographic paper

should contain, Spradley and McCurdy (1988 [1972], 83) proposed the following general outline of a “participant observation paper,” which can serve as a guide to ensuring the respect of scientific standards in ethnographic research:

- 1) Introduction: What is this paper about? How do you define the fundamental concepts you use? What is the plan of the paper?
- 2) Field Work Methods: Why did you select this cultural scene? How did you make contact with informants? Can you describe the characteristics of your main informants? What fieldwork methods did you use? What factors influenced the selection of your data? Did you have any special problems?
- 3) The setting: Can you describe the physical setting and social situation related to the cultural scene? What are the major domains of this cultural scene?
- 4) The Cultural Description: What domains are you going to describe and why? What categories do informants use? How are these categories organized? How are they defined? What is their meaning? How do informants use this information to construct their own behavior?
- 5) Conclusion: Can you make any tentative interpretations about this cultural scene? Can you recommend areas for future research?

In sum, speaking with researchers using other methods requires transparency on the way research has been done, on the difficulties encountered, the choices made, and the rationales behind them. As Descola (2005) has argued, the best way to give an account of what you have done on your field is not to adopt a normative discourse that clouds your actual practice, but to say what you actually did. “It’s definitely better to expound with full ingenuity the windings, the doubts and the accidents that mark out the course of the inquiries and render them possible” (Descola 2005, 66).

■ NOTES

1. To avoid repetition, we use the terms “participant observation” and “ethnography” as synonyms in this chapter, although ethnography usually contains other methods in addition to participant observation.
2. The acceptance of sustained, focused field research as a norm of good practice was stimulated by Boas and Malinovsky. See on this point Kaberry (1957) and Codere (1966).
3. As McCarthy (1991: xi) put it: “McPhail’s elegant critical labors raise an intriguing puzzle: How is it possible that earlier ideas about crowds have been so uncoupled from empirical detail about their nature?” For an overview of studies observing collective gatherings using video and photography, see Lambelet (2010).

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8 Fieldwork in the Context of Violent Conflict and Authoritarian Regimes

Stefan Malthaner

Field research, in some way, is most valuable where it is most difficult. In her discussion of the benefits of fieldwork relative to other social science methods, Elisabeth Wood emphasizes that research based on personal interactions with research subjects in their own environment is particularly useful and important (inter alia) in situations where populations are marginalized or repressed, to study internal dynamics of groups, or under circumstances where actors have reasons to hide their beliefs and perceptions (2006, 126); also, I would add, in settings where aggregated data is for political or structural reasons unavailable or highly distorted. Thus, research on oppositional movements or armed groups is a case in point, particularly in the context of repressive regimes or violent conflicts. Going “into the field” to observe, interview actors, and collect documents may indeed be the best—and sometimes the only—way to obtain valid information in these settings. Yet, the very conditions that make field research valuable also make it difficult. Conflict-ridden environments offer opportunities, but they also entail particular challenges, obstacles, and responsibilities for the researcher in terms of access, field relations, ethical conduct, and personal security.

This chapter discusses some of the challenges of fieldwork in “difficult” environments, in particular in the context of violent conflicts or authoritarian regimes that are particularly relevant for the study of social movements and armed groups. On-site research in conflict environments, particularly in non-OECD countries, has traditionally been rather the domain of anthropologists or (a few) comparative political scientists. Yet, during the past decade, a growing number of social movement scholars have turned their attention towards phenomena of political violence and towards movements in other parts of the world (at the same time, more and more studies on militant groups and violent conflict have adopted a social movement perspective),¹ with many of them doing research that—to different degrees—involves fieldwork in conflict zones.

Field research, thereby, is understood in a rather broad sense as “research based on personal interaction with research subjects in their own setting” (Wood 2007, 124). Field research in this sense covers methods such as interviewing (formal and informal) and participant observation as well as conducting small surveys or collecting documents, and can entail the more or less prolonged presence of the researcher as well as varying degrees of “immersion” in the field. In contrast to “traditional” ethnographic fieldwork conducted by anthropologists, who typically spend one or more years in a specific local environment, comparative social scientists often seek to study several cases, different local contexts, and broader political processes, which means that they tend to spend periods of several months (rather than years) in a certain country, travel to different places, and combine participant observation with other, sometimes more “formal” methods. Yet, all forms of fieldwork have two elementary features in common: (1) they take place in the “subject’s” social environment, which the researcher does not control, on which the researcher depends, and which can hamper, restrict, and shape the research process in various ways; and (2), they involve—and are to a large degree based upon—personal relationships that extend beyond formal encounters and the exchange of information.² Access to the field, to places or groups, is gained through social networks and continuously negotiated in personal interactions, and the main source of information is indeed the process of interacting with people and being part of social situations. These features make fieldwork uniquely fascinating for social scientists but also entail challenges and responsibilities, particularly in violent or repressive contexts. Thus, inevitably, field research is as much about studying the setting and field relationships as it is about the content of interviews, and reflective awareness of the research process with its obstacles—but also as source of data—is the cardinal task for researchers in meeting ethical as well as methodological challenges.

For quite some time, the dangers and methodological problems of fieldwork in conflict zones were rarely mentioned outside a small circle of anthropologists studying civil wars (see Nordstrom and Robben 1995), but during the past decade a growing number of articles and handbook chapters have begun to address the topic (see inter alia Kovats-Bernat 2002; Wood 2006/2007; Robben and Sluka 2007; Sluka 2007; Chakravarty 2012; Mazurana et al. 2013). Another literature that provides helpful insights into the problems of fieldwork in “hostile” environments emerged from sociological and criminological studies on, for example, street gangs and criminal milieus, religious sects, and radical political parties (see inter alia Williams et al. 1992; Jacobs 2006; Fielding 2007). This chapter addresses some of the main points raised in this literature with reference to my own fieldwork on militant Islamist movements in Egypt, Lebanon, Great Britain, and Germany, and armed groups in Peru. It also draws upon experiences of my colleagues of the Junior

Research Group “Micropolitics of Armed Groups” at Humboldt University at Berlin, who between 2001 and 2008 conducted fieldwork in places as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Lebanon, Angola, Sri Lanka and Eritrea, and Serbia (see Salmon 2006; Radtke 2009; Schlichte 2009; Veit 2010; Beck 2012; Malthaner 2011), and incorporates common concerns raised in discussions with doctoral and post-doctoral researchers at the European University Institute in Florence.³

Violent Conflict as a Setting for Research

Many settings can be “hostile” to social science research in the sense that subjects or those controlling access to the field reject collaboration with researchers (Fielding 2007, 236–7). In many respects, the concerns of fieldwork in “dangerous” settings are the same as those of more “traditional” ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation (Balsiger and Lambelet 2014; see also Bernard 2006, 342–86), as well as other forms of qualitative research. Yet, in the context of violent conflict and authoritarian regimes, the challenges of fieldwork are exacerbated in several ways. The *lack of control* over the setting and fundamental aspects of the research process, such as the sample of respondents or the setting of interview, is greater and is of much more severe consequences in conflict zones. The absence of principles of rule of law and individual legal protection as well as, in some cases, the fragmentation of authority, the presence of violent confrontations, and unpredictable developments increase the vulnerability of the researcher as well as participants and can make it extremely hard to plan the research process. Research in conflict zones may not only require a large degree of flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and to avoid danger, but also to seize opportunities when they come up. Moreover, *field relations* are in various ways shaped by ongoing violent conflict or state repression, because these can create extreme social polarization, and suspicion, as well as tangible personal risks and costs. In particular, respondents who are associated with oppositional movements or give information about sensitive topics may face reprisals from state security services or political opponents, which may require the researcher to undertake quite extreme measures to protect his or her identity and to secure notes from falling into the wrong hands.

In short, conflict settings can create particular problems for negotiating access and establishing trust, as well as ethical challenges. The manner in which they do so, however, varies significantly, depending on the structure of the field. Or in other words: different political regimes, underlying power structures, types of conflicts, and local settings impede or facilitate field research in quite different ways. When doing fieldwork in Egypt in 2004 and

2005, I was confronted with an authoritarian regime that tightly controlled any form of political activism and in which oppositional groups, in particular the Islamist movement, were under close surveillance by the ever-present “State Security Police” (*mabahis amn al-dawla*). Security forces regularly arrested members of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as other Islamic activists and closely monitored former leaders and members of al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya, the militant movement on which I was doing research. Foreign academics were in no danger of being arrested or maltreated by the police (the greatest danger was probably to be extradited), but indirect restrictions were imposed on their activities. Some Islamic activists who initially had agreed to meet for an interview later withdrew, having been told by the security police to refrain from doing so. The main concern in this context obviously was the security of participants. Several months after I had done a few interviews with a group of young men in a mosque in a suburb in the northeast of Cairo, police raided the area and the mosque, arresting a large number of people, including relatives of an interview partner. Although the arrests were not related to the research, they intimidated residents who—for very good reasons, indeed—then decided to end their cooperation. These tensions were heightened by political events, particularly terrorist bomb-attacks on the Sinai Peninsula (October 2004 and July 2005) and in Cairo (April 2005), after which the government adopted an even more repressive policy against Islamic groups and the Muslim Brotherhood, arresting many leaders, local activists, and residents of the Sinai and some neighborhoods in Cairo.

In Lebanon in 2006 and 2007, in contrast, I found a situation in which authority was fragmented, with a relatively weak central government and powerful armed organizations that exerted a considerable degree of military and political control in parts of the country. Moreover, the movement I focused on there, Hizbullah, was considered a legitimate actor and was accessible without threat of persecution from the ruling regime. Research was interrupted, however, by the Israeli military offensive in July and August 2006, followed several months later by political tensions between Hizbullah and the governing coalition led by Prime Minister Fouad Signiora, which were accompanied by protests and violent clashes in Beirut and other parts of the country. The war created immediate security and logistical problems, making it difficult to travel into and around the country. But in the aftermath, the injustice suffered, as well as the “victorious” resistance, made people in south Lebanon also quite open and willing to talk to foreigners and share their experiences. Problems of access emerged with respect to Shiite “dissidents” (critical of Hizbullah), as a result of a wave of patriotism which swept the Shiite community after the war, which included the defamation of critics as “traitors,” and as a result of sectarian tensions later that year. People who seemed willing to participate in April 2006 ended their cooperation after the war because the “climate” did not permit it. Also, while the state was

largely absent from large parts of southern Beirut, issues of surveillance and control came up with the internal security branch of Hizbullah. Members of Hizbullah were obliged to “register” contacts with foreigners, particularly foreign researchers; people taking photos in the southern suburbs or during demonstrations in West Beirut (including myself) were routinely stopped and questioned by Hizbullah members; and various neighborhoods and areas could only be entered in the company of an authorized Hizbullah member.

What should become clear from these examples is that different conflict settings and political contexts can create very different issues of security and problems with respect to access and field relationships. Patterns of political authority and control determine possible access restrictions as well as risks for the researcher and informants, and while violent conflict can induce overwhelming distrust and closure in some places, it also can create openings and make people willing, or even enthusiastic, to “tell their story.” Therefore, it is important to be aware of the value of these difficulties as an analytical resource. As Fielding points out: “Obstruction, evasion, refusals and other troubles can in themselves be significant sources of data” (Fielding 2007, 238; see also Delamont 2007, 213). In fact, it is through encounters with state agents, resistance to access, or the withdrawal of participants, that the researcher is able to understand the subtle power structures and mechanism of control that govern the field of research, and time and care should be invested to document them in detail and include them in the analysis. Even being suspected of being a spy, or personal attacks, may provide important information about the political processes and conflicts in the field (see Nash 1976 [2007], 233). In the case of Hizbullah, for example, encounters and observations involving restrictions on access and movement in the southern suburbs and during demonstrations in West Beirut were extremely valuable in analyzing local mechanisms of governance and control.

A second lesson that can be drawn from these examples is to recognize the necessity to adapt to changing conditions and the need for a certain flexibility in the research process. When confronted with unforeseen difficulties or sudden changes in their environment, researchers may be forced to change and revise their research strategies to cope with emerging problems and take advantage of opportunities, even if this means deviating from research designs and partly abandoning work plans. This pertains to the selection of areas of research, such as neighborhoods and communities which may, eventually, be determined as much by the simple feasibility of conducting research and opportunities of access as by more theoretical considerations. But also methodological approaches may have to be adapted in the process. When participatory observation turns out to be too dangerous because of pervasive state surveillance and ongoing violent confrontations, researchers may need to focus rather, for example, on individually arranged interviews. Recognizing that the research process in conflict zones is to a considerable degree shaped by the political environment may be helpful in coping with the problems one

encounters, in practical as well as in emotional terms. In many respects, the researcher is at the mercy of events. In this situation, as Pamela Nilan observed in her work, orienting oneself towards the standards of “formal” sociological methods, which imply control by the researcher over the context and the process of research, can induce anxiety and a feeling of failure when realizing that one is unable to exert this kind of control (2002, 363–6). Recognizing the limits of one’s own control over the research process can help with coping with these challenges. Yet, flexibility in this sense increases—rather than lessens—the need for theoretical scrutiny and precision in the researcher’s theoretical framework and objective. When the research environment imposes changes on the methodological approach, it is imperative to reflect on the implications for the research design and theoretical questions, and to critically observe and analyze the trajectory of the research process.

In the rest of this chapter, I will address some of the aspects of fieldwork in conflict settings more specifically and with regard to practical implications.

Field Relationships: Negotiating Access, Building Networks, Establishing Trust

Obviously, different forms of fieldwork entail and require quite different forms of field relationships and networks. Anthropologists often spend long periods of time in more or less confined local settings, engaging in close and prolonged interactions with a limited set of local respondents, allowing them to build trustful relations over time. In contrast, comparative social scientists, who may seek to study broader political processes in several cases, often have to gain access to networks and establish trust with participants in relatively short periods of time and in various locations. Whereas in the first type of research, relationships can—after initial access is gained—be built by patience and constant interaction (by “hanging out” in a local setting), the latter depends to a much larger degree on pre-existing networks, key informants, gatekeepers, and facilitating intermediaries (individuals and organizations). Yet, whatever the character of a particular research project, several elements in the process of gaining access and building networks of participants are of general importance.

INITIAL ACCESS

In all kinds of fieldwork, negotiating access is one of the cardinal challenges and entails similar problems (see Bernard 2006; Delamont 2007; Fielding

2007); also, as Balsiger and Lambelet emphasize, how first access is achieved has considerable impact on the research process (see Balsiger and Lambelet in this volume). In conflict settings, initial access may be gained simply by contacting the leadership or representatives of an armed group, political organization, or a particular community through formal, institutional channels. Other, more indirect institutional entry-points are, for example, humanitarian NGOs and human rights organizations, or local priests or teachers. “Official entry,” thereby, can entail the problem that the researcher is seen as “representing” or being on the side of the leadership or management, which might be a problem, for example when doing research on protests against this leadership (see Nash 1976 [2007]; Peritore 1990, 368). But official access does not preclude building trust among the rank and file and local residents, and in some cases, working with an official permit might be inevitable. In tightly controlled organizations, for example, or where access to a certain locality is restricted, access can only be gained by negotiating access with official leaders.

More often, however, initial access and important contacts are established in a more informal manner, through networks of colleagues, friends, or relatives who are in some way connected to the field, who can make introductions and facilitate further contacts. Informal personal networks are particularly important in conflict settings as they can create trust through common acquaintances and introduction by a familiar person who, in some way, “vouches” for the researcher (see the next section of the chapter). Often, formal and informal channels are combined, as official contacts are more easily made on the recommendation of a colleague or friend. Therefore, preparing for fieldwork often involves “activating” close or distant personal networks with links to the country, location, or organization one seeks to study. The most important initial contacts for my fieldwork in Egypt were made through two Egyptian friends who studied at my home university in Germany. They introduced me to some of their friends in Egypt who, after spending a lot of time together, introduced me to their families. Some family members, as it turned out, lived in neighborhoods notorious for having been strongholds of the Islamist movement I was studying. In Lebanon, I had the privilege of being introduced by a very good friend, a Shiite from Beirut, to his family, who are connected to the Islamic current. Through them I got in touch with people who invited me to visit them in their villages in south Lebanon, to join religious celebrations, and observe party events and small meetings.

Access through personal networks is an important element of other kinds of qualitative research, too, of course. Yet, under conditions of violent conflict or state repression, its role may be crucial. Pre-existing friendships or family relations are uniquely powerful in opening doors and bestowing the researcher with initial trust, even in situations when people are afraid, suspicious, or reluctant to cooperate. However, personal networks also require the researcher

to be willing to get involved in a much more personal and sometimes emotionally challenging way, entail particular ethical responsibilities (see the next section of the chapter), and can also entangle the researcher in local conflicts and create bias in the sample of respondents. For example, when accessing the field as the friend or guest of a certain family, the researcher becomes associated with them, which might make it more difficult to approach persons who for some reason hold a grudge against this family. A particular situation emerges when researchers who were born and raised in a certain area return to their home country or hometown to do field research, such as Joseba Zulaika in the Basque country (Zulaika 1995) or Maria Olujic in Croatia (Olujic 1995). Thereby, while able to gain unique insights, family associations and the researcher's personal history may also create role conflicts, as Zulaika experienced when encountering old friends who wanted to persuade him to join ETA: "I returned to my village to do fieldwork on the very thing I had dodged [participation in an armed group]. It was then that I began to realize the incongruities of my role as ethnographer" (Zulaika 1995, 207–8).

Regardless of possible bias and conflicts of interest, however, access via pre-existing personal networks may in many cases still be an adequate, and sometimes the only option, in particular in the context of high levels of tension and repression or closed organizations. Moreover, as Swedenburg emphasizes, the view that the research field is—and has to be—"virgin territory" is misleading (Swedenburg 1995, 29). Researchers are not neutral and bring with them pre-existing friendships and experiences, which form the basis of their expertise as well as of their motivation to study a certain area or movement (Swedenburg 1995, 29–30). While necessarily subject to reflection and sometimes adjustments, this personal "history" with their subject is a main strength of researchers working on violent conflicts.

"KEY INFORMANTS," GATE-KEEPERS, AND INTERMEDIARIES

In most field research processes, certain people play a special role in facilitating access, providing initial contacts, as guides who help to negotiate unknown social networks, and as councils who help to understand social rules and cultural meanings (Peritore 1990; Kawulich 2011). They are individuals with whom the researcher has developed particularly trustful relationships and often friendships and who are, ideally, well connected in the field. As with entry-points and personal networks in general, researchers need to be aware of bias and should strive not to become too dependent on key informants. Also, conflicts involving the research project might fall back on key informants who are seen as being affiliated with the researcher (Peritore 1990, 368). Nevertheless, being supported by a group of local friends and key allies is crucial, particularly in conflictive or dangerous environments.

Trusted advice and guidance is central to negotiating risky and unknown social and political terrain, and local friends are the first ones the researcher can turn to for help, not only when field relations turn hostile (Nash 1976 [2007], 228–33; Peritore 1990, 368), but also with other problems (threats, robberies), particularly in areas where academic institutions and diplomatic assistance are absent.

Humanitarian NGOs are frequently used as institutional intermediaries to gain access to and get in touch with respondents. This has many advantages because they can often provide some logistics (transport, a room for interviews), are present in local settings and have access to the people they provide assistance to, and are sometimes trusted because of their more or less “neutral” position in a conflict (see Wood 2006; Radtke 2009). In some cases, NGOs or other intermediaries might even “provide” interviewees to the researcher. While these arrangements can represent useful starting points for building one’s own, parallel networks, the obvious danger is being associated too closely with the respective organization, as well as further losing control over the sample of respondents (see Nash 1976 [2007], 255). Problems may arise when humanitarian organizations seek to control the research process, either out of a legitimate interest in protecting the people they care for or because they promote a certain political view, for example in the form of restricting access to respondents or requiring that a member of their organization is present at interviews.

Other intermediary figures in fieldwork are local research assistants and interpreters, whose influence on the research can be significant. Whenever possible, researchers should gain some autonomy by acquiring language skills, at least to a level that enables them to follow conversations and pick up inconsistencies in the translation. Also, when an outsider to the field, or when affiliated with one side or group, interpreters and local assistants can become a disturbance to field relationships and make it harder to establish personal relations with respondents. In Egypt and Lebanon, I asked key informants and friends who were members of local families to interpret interviews when I felt that my Arabic was too limited, which proved to be a quite workable solution. Yet, in a few cases I had the impression that being accompanied by local research assistants was a problem for my interviewees, because while I, as a foreign researcher, could be trusted more easily, the affiliation and position of my local assistant was not apparent to them.

NETWORKS AND SAMPLING

After initial access, the sample of interviewees and other research participants is mostly built by “snowball sampling,” or “respondent pyramiding” (Peritore 1990, 367; see also Cohen and Arieli 2011); that is, through

an evolving network of contacts (Wood 2006, 375). Interviews and other encounters are used to generate new contacts and to expand relations via introduction to friends of friends. Therefore, identifying and building trustful relations with key persons at central nodes of networks, who interact with and connect important parts of the network, is crucial (Peritore 1990, 367). Expanding networks can also be facilitated by participant observations or simply by being present and interacting with people in the field, in particular by attending meetings, rallies, or demonstrations. On these occasions, people already in touch with the researcher might introduce her/him to others, or might simply provide opportunities for chance encounters and making acquaintances. In all “snowball-sampling” processes, the researcher has only partial control over the selection of respondents, and samples drawn in this way are obviously never statistically representative. But they can provide the basis for qualitatively valid insights. Researchers should strive to control for possible bias by being attentive to the selectivity of the networks they use, by trying to cover a broad variety of social and personal backgrounds in their interviews, and by including diverging or dissident positions (see Wood 2006, 375). When doing interviews in a neighborhood in the suburbs of Cairo, for example, I sought to select respondents “strategically” in the sense that I tried, as far as possible, to include typical as well as contrasting positions. In addition to former and actual members of Islamist groups, I made sure to interview their family members, activists of rival groups, one government employee critical of the movement, one local journalist, etc.

When expanding contacts through “snowball” networking, providing the name of a person or making the introduction requires a considerable degree of trust on the part of the interviewee who recommends the researcher to his friends or fellow activists. Referring to the person who established the contact is a means of establishing trust through a common acquaintance, but researchers should be careful to manage “name-dropping” in a way that does not endanger participants or tarnish their name. Therefore, the common question raised by interviewees at the beginning of the conversation, as to whom else the researcher has spoken to before, can be quite tricky to answer, because of the need to protect the identity of respondents on the one hand, and the importance of personal references on the other. In addition, being overly secretive might create suspicion. Where possible, it is advantageous if introductions can be made personally, and in any case the person who established a contact must be asked for permission to “use their name.”

In general, moving safely within personal networks requires good knowledge about relationships as well as honesty and consistency in all interactions. Researchers should be aware of the fact that even in loosely connected networks people know each other and will talk about their research and conduct. Giving different versions of the research topic, or expressing one’s own

political opinion in different ways, for example, can create confusion and suspicion, and undermine trustful relationships (Peritore 1990, 363).

It is important to be aware that field relationships and contact networks are fluid and, in particular in conflict settings, can change quickly as a result of internal power struggles and political developments. It is one thing to establish networks of informants initially, another to preserve them and maintain sound and stable relations. Contacts can close down when tensions rise due to external circumstances or due to changes in the leadership of an organization or internal power struggles. Access is not gained at the beginning of field research and that is it. Field relations have to be continuously renegotiated and managed: as Fielding points out: “In qualitative research we are always negotiating access” (2007, 238). This is particularly true for trust and rapport with respondents.

TRUST

Trust is a central recurring theme in the literature on ethnographic fieldwork. As Anne Ryen put it, “trust is the traditional magic key to building good field relations” (Ryen 2007, 222); without trust neither access nor valid data can be gained (for a summary, see Chakravarty 2012). Yet, it is important to emphasize that trust in field relationships is not a binary condition—a matter of “having” trust or not having it—nor is trust some magical element that somehow “is” there. By trust I mean relationships with informants that are characterized by the fact that people to some extent and with respect to certain issues confide in the personal and professional integrity of the researcher, which is the basis of their willingness to cooperate. Trustful relationships in this sense may involve a mixture of personal respect and affection, broader patterns of social relationships within the local setting and beyond, institutional legitimacy and professional status, as well as quite utilitarian considerations of risks and benefits. Trust, thus, exist in quite different forms and degrees, and varies in relation to different individuals in the field. The bases of trust are, first, institutional backgrounds, personal networks, and pre-existing relations that “introduce” the researcher to an environment or group and provide “reference” via common acquaintances. Second, and crucially, trust is established in interactions in the field, based on shared experiences, trustworthy conduct, open and honest self-representation, and reciprocity.

To a certain extent, the researcher’s personal background might be helpful, for example when she/he was born and raised in a certain country or village, shares the same ethnic or social background (e.g., also comes from a farmer’s, worker’s, or miner’s family, etc.), or shares the research subjects’ political

views. Yet, common social background and shared political views do not *per se* generate trust, and in some situations it might be easier to trust “neutral” outsiders. In Lebanon after the 2006 war, people were quite enthusiastic to talk to a foreign researcher, whom they trusted to “tell their story.” During one visit to the family of a Hizbullah fighter, however, his mother started questioning me about my views on the legitimacy of Israeli bombardment of her country, asking me how I could accept that the German government, as she put it, “always sides with Israel.” During my fieldwork in Lebanon, I did not hesitate to express honest sympathy for people’s suffering and condemned, for example, the bombardment of civilian areas, but I had decided to avoid discussions about the legitimacy of one side or the other. On this occasion, the Hizbullah fighter himself unexpectedly came to my rescue, telling his mother that she should not push me towards taking sides. My job, he explained to her, was to do research and analyze the events “objectively.” Even (or particularly) in the context of violent conflicts, in my experience, many people respect the role of academic researchers, and sincere interest in their story and a willingness to understand their point of view is often appreciated. Under certain conditions, however, it might be impossible to remain “neutral.” As June Nash recounts from her experience during a strike in a Bolivian mine, polarization during escalating political conflicts may make it impossible to remain impartial as circumstances—and actors—force researchers to take sides (Nash 1976 [2007]).

Beyond the question of “neutrality,” trustful field relationships require the researcher to present her/his work truthfully and be as reciprocal and open as possible in her/his personal and professional relations (Wood 2006, 2007; Chakravarty 2012). Self-representation should be consistent and honest (although “re-framing” might be necessary; see the section on “informed consent” below), and researchers can provide “feedback” by making copies of articles or books accessible to people in the field. Moreover, trust is built in shared experiences, which may include shared experiences of danger or “complicity,” in which the researcher becomes familiar as a person and proves to be trustworthy (see Nash 1976 [2007]; Peritore 1990, 366; Chakravarty 2012). Also, researchers are often subjected to “tests,” for example by questioning them on certain issues or by observing their conduct in certain situations. In my case, this included answering questions about my views on the Bible from an Islamist sheikh in Cairo who, as I read the situation, was testing my sincerity in discussing matters of religion. “Tests” also included more mundane things, such as playing street-soccer at night with young guys from Hizbullah against some chaps from the neighborhood, to show, if not skill, at least some humor and a willingness to engage “as a person,” on a level beyond academic and even political matters.

Trust emerges from personal relationships and evolving processes of interaction. It is not a permanent “feature” of relations, but can be lost quickly

as a result of one's own mistakes or a turn of events (Nash 1976 [2007], 226–30; Chakravarty 2012, 266). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, not all field relationships are equally trustful. Whereas some people become core allies and friends, interactions with others are shorter or shaped by hierarchical distances, social roles, or personal animosities. In addition, in some conflict settings it is much more difficult to build trust than in others. As Anuradha Chakravarty found out in her research on trials in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, in the socially divided and politically repressive setting she encountered, fear and strategies to distort information in order to survive allowed only for delicate relationships of “partial trust,” as she called it (Chakravarty 2012). Under conditions of uncertainty, social disintegration, fear, and trauma, silence and secrecy may become pervasive. When recognized and made explicit, these relationships can still provide a stable and workable basis for research (Chakravarty 2012, 265–7); and patterns of silence and fear may indeed represent important insights and analytical resources (Green 1995). Chakravarty argues that dealing explicitly and reflexively with partial trust and silence allows us to make clear what we can and cannot know in certain settings, and it reminds us to “respect the limits of field relationships,” which helps us to avoid provoking fear and hostility and to recognize danger (Chakravarty 2012, 254).

Ethical Issues: Informed Consent, Protecting Participants

One of the most frequent problems field researchers encounter in conflict settings is that they are suspected of being a spy for intelligence agencies or other hostile powers. As Sluka emphasizes, this suspicion is not always unfounded (Sluka 2007, 220), insofar, he advises that to avert the risk of being taken for a spy, first of all, one should not be a spy (Sluka 1995, 283); or in a broader sense, I would add, not act in bad faith. Certainly, field relationships should be as honest and open as possible, for reasons of research ethics as well as to acquire valid data and ensure personal safety during fieldwork.

The basic ethical requirement with respect to participants in social science research is *informed consent*; that is, the duty of researchers to present themselves as such to participants, to inform them about their research and possible consequences, and to obtain their explicit agreement (see Wood 2006, 379–80; 2007, 139). Covert research as well as deliberately deceptive self-representation with respect to fundamental aspects of the research should, in any case, be out of bounds even (or rather, particularly) in difficult research contexts. Indispensable cornerstones, I would argue, are (1) to make

explicit, in interviews and when being invited into private spaces, that one is doing social science research; and (2) that this research will be published; and (3) to respect the explicit refusal of people to participate in the research. Yet, to realize ethical standards in fieldwork also requires acknowledging ethical dilemmas and the limitations of what can realistically be expected of researchers in the field. To some extent, as Anne Ryen emphasizes: “doing qualitative research often compels us to deviate from idealistic rules and statements of ethical practice” (2007, 219).

Gaining access and establishing contacts often requires some degree of “impression management,” not all people somehow involved in the research can be accorded the highest standards of informed consent, and certain situations may require some amount of secrecy towards some people, for example towards police or other officials (see Sluka 1995, 285; Ryen 2007, 219–21; Chakravarty 2012, 255). One frequent issue, therefore, is how to present the topic of research. Most researchers “de-fuse” particularly sensitive or controversial topics, which might impede access if stated in full detail up front. For example, members of armed groups are often very reluctant to talk about funding strategies, human rights abuses, or internal conflicts, preferring much more to talk about political legitimacy and heroic struggles. One strategy to avoid initial rejection without being untruthful about the topic is to state it in more general terms, telling people that the researcher is studying the “history of the conflict,” or is “writing a book about the movement,” which can work in initial dealings and with superficial contacts. The fact that many PhD candidates at the beginning of their fieldwork are indeed themselves not quite sure about what their precise topic will be may also lend some legitimacy to this strategy. Yet, even the “I’m just writing a book” approach can create a sense of betrayal, and can become dangerous when people find out that the researcher is actually pursuing a rather specific issue of which they disapprove or which they consider to be dangerous for themselves. Thereby, a guideline may be reciprocal honesty. It is obviously impractical to disclose controversial details of the research project in every fleeting encounter. Yet, the closer the relationship with a person becomes, and the greater the trust that person awards the researcher, the greater is the latter’s responsibility to be equally honest in return and to inform that person about aspects of the project that might be problematic.

Another issue of “informed consent” is that participants should be clear about the risks and consequences involved in the research, which, however, are often extremely hard to foresee for either the researcher or her/his respondents (Peritore 1990, 361). In the context of authoritarian regimes and violent conflicts, these consequences can be severe, either because participants may be identified as members of armed groups, oppositional movements, or as dissident intellectuals, who are persecuted by police or targeted for assassinations by paramilitary groups; or because participants fall under the suspicion

of having revealed secret information and are accused of being a traitor or spy (see Sluka 1995). Consequently, the protection of participants' identity, precise locations of research, etc., must be given highest priority (Ryen 2007, 221–3). Thereby, researchers have to take into account that, with local knowledge, it is possible to infer respondents' identities or places from surprisingly little circumstantial information. Moreover, especially when doing research on insurgent groups or oppositional movements persecuted by state governments, not only published information can endanger participants, but police might also seize field notes, tapes, and other materials, or researchers might face lawsuits that aim at forcing them to submit data to the authorities (see Sluka 1995; Ryen 2007, 222–3). The paramount obligation of all research to “do no harm” can mean, under certain conditions, that researchers not only must refrain from publishing certain information, but also from recording it in writing or on tape (on the practical aspects of protecting informants, see “Adapting Research Techniques” below).

Adapting Research Techniques

Researchers doing fieldwork in conflict settings use a variety of methods—in particular qualitative interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and small surveys—and the way they are applied follows, of course, to a large extent the general rules of the trade (see Bernard 2006; Balsiger and Lambelet 2014; della Porta 2014; on observation, see also Sluka 1990 and Adler and Adler 1994; on interviewing, see Fontana and Frey 1994 and Rapley 2007). Yet, the sensitive nature of many topics involving violence and victimization, increased suspicion and distrust, as well as the particular risks and dangers of research in the context of violent conflict and state repression entail that researchers may need to take particular issues into consideration and adapt research practices and methods.

Doing interviews with victims or perpetrators of violence may pose some particular challenges. Fujii (2010), in her research on the genocide in Rwanda, frequently observed patterns of narration which on first sight might seem “untruthful” or to represent a form of rejecting full cooperation with the researcher, such as inventions, denials, evasions, and silences with respect to certain topics (Fujii 2010, 232–8). She argues, however, that these narratives represent forms of coping with conditions in the present—and are shaped by them—or reflect particular aspects of the violent conflict and political process. Rather than a failure of the interview or a lack of truthfulness, these narrative patterns constitute important “meta-data” that provides valuable information and must be carefully analyzed and interpreted (Fujii 2010, 232, 239). The failure to recognize these patterns can result in cardinal

misinterpretations and overlooking important elements of the process under study. As with other features mentioned in this chapter, evasions, taboos, etc. can be present in all kinds of interview, of course. Yet, in the context of violent conflict, they may take on a particular quality, involving severe suffering, shame, and guilt (on fear and silences, see also Green 1995). Obviously, silences and taboos need particularly careful handling and consideration during the interview, as well as in their interpretation (Fujii 2010, 238; see also Chakravarty 2012). When conducting interviews with victims of severe human rights violations, researchers need to be aware of the fact that reliving traumatic events may involve some degree of re-traumatization and should prepare by consulting psychologists or therapists specialized in the field.

Adapting methods can also involve quite practical matters. When conducting formal interviews, finding suitable locations and ensuring privacy can be an issue, as researchers cannot always control who is present at interviews; and trying to impose a formal interview structure, instead of letting the situation develop, can harm field relations. When talking to residents of suburbs of Cairo or Beirut, interviews often turned into group conversations, with family members or friends joining in and commenting on each other's opinions and experiences. While it is important to complement these encounters with individual conversations, they represent valuable opportunities to observe group interactions and collective constructions of common history. More problematic issues arise in situations where the leadership of an organization or intermediaries seek to exert control over the research and demand, for example, that representatives are present at interviews, or issue "official" interpreters. To circumvent this control without provoking resistance, researchers can use "official" appointments to establish contacts but try to build parallel relationships and meet people for additional conversations in private (Nash 1976 [2007], 225).

The often informal characters of encounters in the field—together with concerns of security and anonymity—also create the problem of how to record and document these conversations and observations. Many respondents will refuse tape-recordings out of fear of possible negative consequences, and sometimes asking for permission to record may already interrupt the smooth flow of the conversation and create irritation in group settings. In authoritarian regimes or tense political situations, people often associate tape-recording conversations with journalistic, intelligence, or other "shady" work, and it might not be advisable in public places. When talking to a person in a street-café in the suburbs of Cairo during the Mubarak regime, for example, putting a recorder on the table would certainly have drawn unfavorable attention.

In some situations, particularly when doing observations of private events, conspicuous note taking can be problematic, too. When traveling to south Lebanon with some members of Hizbullah, I was invited to family dinners

and to attend a large celebration and prayers on the occasion of the opening of the newly built house of a middle-ranking leader, and in Beirut I was invited to attend an event during which students of a school run by Hizbullah presented little poems and were given their certificates by the principal. While accepted as a guest, it would have been highly inappropriate to scribble away on my notebook during these occasions and could have embarrassed the person who brought me. The procedure under these circumstances was to write down key words or very short notes when appropriate, and then write more detailed accounts in my field diary as soon as I had some privacy, mostly during the night. With some practice, events, encounters, and conversations can be reproduced in surprising detail from memory. Key words or short notes can thereby be used to trigger memories, which then make it possible to reproduce sequences of connected events or statements.

In dangerous and repressive settings, protecting notes and the identity of respondents is of paramount importance. The first rule, therefore, should be to not take down names and precise locations together with field notes. Also, technical and other information of military relevance should not be written down unless absolutely necessary. Notes can be protected by technical means, usually by typing them up and encrypting the files, and sending them home via e-mail or cell-phones (and destroying handwritten notes) (Wood 2006, 381; 2007, 139). Other methods discussed at workshops at the EUI and in Berlin include taking notes in sketchy and unclear handwriting or shorthand, in order to make them unusable for others, and to use the researcher's native language, particularly when it is not widely spoken in the respective country (e.g., Greek when doing research in the Middle East) (see also Peritore 1990, 365). When researchers are unable to type up notes because they have no access to a safe computer, handwritten notes can be photographed with a cellphone and the image files be sent home as e-mail or mms. During long periods of fieldwork, notes and recordings can be sent home with visitors or colleagues. Yet, while technical precautions can be useful to secure the anonymity of respondents and the content of notes (also in the case of losing them, for example), researchers should refrain from behaving like "amateur-spies," which can draw the attention of security forces and raise suspicions in the first place, endangering researchers and informants alike.

Personal Security

Threats to the personal security of researchers in conflict zones can result from the general hazards of these environments, which may include illnesses, high levels of violent crime, and frequent traffic accidents, sometimes aggravated by the lack of medical infrastructure (see Howell 1990; Mazurana and

Gale 2013). In post-war situations such as in south Lebanon in 2006, unexploded munitions and mines may pose a threat when moving around the countryside. Depending on the situation, researchers may also face certain dangers more specifically related to their work, such as being arrested and interrogated by the police (Salmon 2006), or being threatened, harassed, or violently attacked by their research subjects, security forces, or paramilitary groups. While field relations can become hostile, state security forces and death squads are, as Sluka emphasizes, typically the far greater and more serious danger, being responsible for most known assassinations of social scientists in conflict zones (Sluka 1995, 288). While it should be kept in mind that locals, and particular local activists, humanitarian workers, or journalists, in general face much greater dangers than researchers visiting conflict zones for a couple of months, this is no reason to ignore these risks. Doing fieldwork in “hostile” environments should involve some evaluation of threats, preparation, and danger-management strategies (Sluka 1995, 276, 280; Mazurana and Gale 2013). Researchers can use exploratory visits to the field to assess the situation and discuss it with their supervisors and colleagues (see Sluka 1995, 280–82; Kovats-Bernat 2002). For all practical matters, manuals published by the United Nations and large NGOs⁴ provide helpful information, and some organizations offer security trainings for journalists and humanitarian-aid workers (see Mazurana and Gale 2013). Also, some kind of check-in routine should be put in place and arrangements for an emergency should be made. The procedure used in the junior research group “Micropolitics of Armed Groups” required researchers to check in regularly during field research and a central contact person was put in charge of organizing a response should something go wrong, as in the case of Jago Salmon, who was arrested in Sudan and held in custody for two weeks (see Salmon 2006). Other more practical arrangements to minimize danger include notifying local contacts about movements in the country, going accompanied, or meeting in public places when in doubt about the trustworthiness of contacts (see Fielding 2007, 239).

Yet, the most important protection for researchers during field research, I would argue, is good knowledge of the field and, in particular, good field relations and local support networks. The literature on ethnographic field research often emphasizes the researcher’s responsibility to protect respondents, implying that researchers are quite in control of the situation and capable of protecting others from harm. Reality in the field, however, might be very different. In fact, in dangerous fields, it is often the researcher who depends on key informants, local friends, and allies for guidance and often protection in an environment which she/he, at least at the beginning, would not be able to navigate alone for lack of knowledge about basic power structures, danger zones, and rules, and in which she/he is regarded as foreign and possibly as a threat (see Kovats-Bernat 2002). People in the field not only have local knowledge, but also a much better understanding of political developments and the dangers emerging from them. Elisabeth Wood,

for example, emphasized that the rural residents she interviewed in El Salvador: “[. . .] had a more highly developed sense of the evolving risks of violence in their area than I did. Their political expertise in this far exceeded mine, which was too inexperienced and too naïve, and I did my best to learn from them” (Wood 2006, 380). In other words, in a situation of very limited knowledge and control on the part of the researcher, trustful field relationships and local support networks are crucial in protecting researchers from danger; the most dangerous situations often emerge from mistakes that hurt field relations, and create suspicions of betrayal, fear, and hostility.

A common experience of field researchers is being unsure how much precaution is necessary and when paranoia begins. As Jeffrey Sluka makes clear, there is a balance to be kept between, on the one hand, ignoring dangers (to oneself and others) and, on the other hand, being paranoid (Sluka 1995, 289–90). To find this balance, advice from local friends and colleagues is crucial, as well as, ultimately, relying on one’s own experiences in the field.

By Way of Conclusion: The Benefits of Fieldwork

The challenges of fieldwork in conflict zones are in many respects similar to those of participant observation and other forms of research under “non-violent” conditions. Yet, in these contexts, some of the cardinal tasks of field research—gaining access, establishing rapport and trust in field relations, and protecting informants—are exacerbated by the particularities of violent environments and the risks they entail. From another point of view, this also means that research experiences made in conflict zones or in the context of authoritarian regimes can be highly useful for fieldwork in other settings, because they highlight essential features and problems.

But also in a much broader sense fieldwork in conflict zones offers benefits and opportunities, and should not only be discussed with respect to constraints and shortcomings in applying social science methods “properly.” Political mobilization, virulent conflict, and violent confrontations are particularly fruitful contexts for observations and interviews, because politics are suddenly played out in the open, because people become eager to tell their story and present their point of view to outsiders, and because people often appreciate researchers taking the effort and the risk to study events on site. Where the political context is hostile, encounters in “pockets of hospitality” may, in fact, be even more open, trustful, and rich in information, rewarding researchers for any troubles she/he might have taken to get to the scene.

Moreover, for the student of processes of mobilization and political violence, fieldwork provides a healthy encounter with the reality of the social world she/

he set out to study. As Peritore notes, “[C]ontact with complex field situations creates a profound understanding that transcends what can be gained at a distance or through formal methodologies” (1990, 370). So, beyond information gathered in interviews and observations, the fundamental benefit of fieldwork is to challenge preconceptions and preconceived explanations by way of confronting researchers with the reality of the field through personal experiences and encounters. Moreover, certain insights simply can only be gained in the field. During a visit to a family in a southern Lebanese village, it was the jokes told at the dinner table that made me understand that the relation between some families of Hizbullah fighters and the organization’s leadership included not only solidarity and support but also a considerable degree of proud independence and irony. The mother and daughter-in-law had stayed in the family’s house for the first ten days during the war, supporting their sons, who had been on nightly “duty” for the resistance, but they then fled to Beirut. By the time of the visit, the family had returned and partly rebuilt their home, even though an unexploded missile was still embedded in a field nearby and villagers were collecting cluster bomblets in vegetable boxes. Proudly aware of their own contribution to the struggle, the mother was not shy to make fun of the hypocrisy of a Shiite *sheik* who had tried to spread religious piety among refugees in Beirut by announcing to the crowd: “Now, everybody who will come pray with me will get a blanket!” Being part of the backbone of the resistance, and having borne the brunt of the conflict, they felt no need to glorify Hizbullah. Laughing, the mother also told the story of an elderly peasant in their village who, shortly after the war, gave an interview to national television, duly lauding and praising Hizbullah and their “divine victory.” After the camera crew left, the peasant matter-of-factly approached one Hizbullah member and exclaimed: “Now you bastards! I want to have my house back!”

■ NOTES

1. See, inter alia, della Porta (2008; 2013); Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner (2014).
2. See also Balsiger and Lambelet in this volume, who emphasize that collecting “first-hand” data and “experiencing” are defining features of field research.
3. I am grateful, in particular, for the helpful comments on this paper by Frank O’Connor, Bougmilla Hall, Donatella della Porta, and Alice Mattoni.
4. For example, the manual *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments: A Field Manual for Aid Agencies*, published by the Overseas Development Institute (2010).

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9 Discourse and Frame Analysis

In-Depth Analysis of Qualitative Data in Social Movement Research

Lasse Lindekilde

Introduction to Discourse and Frame Analysis in Social Movement Research

The linguistic or cognitive turn that swept the humanities and the social sciences in the 1970s hit the subfield of social movement studies in the early 1980s as an evolving criticism of the established paradigm of resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977). The criticism was that resource mobilization theory had over-emphasized the importance of selective incentives and rational calculus in its explanation of protest participation and activism, and did not pay sufficient attention to the role of grievances and ideology as determinants of participation (Klandermans 1984). The problem, it was argued, was that studies of social movements could not convincingly explain why some topics, grievances, and demands came to the fore as the focus of political protests rather than others (see also Donati 1992). This inability became increasingly obvious with the spread of the so-called “new social movements” across Western countries, which centered on issues of peace, the environment, women’s rights, and so on.

In response, also to the linguistic turn in general, scholars of social movements began to pay attention to the cognitive mechanisms by which grievances are interpreted, given direction and consensus around the goals of political activism created (Gamson 1988; Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988). Likewise, scholars began to investigate systematically how collective identities were established around particular collective goals within “new social movements” (e.g., Melucci 1988). These theoretical advances led to the birth of more linguistic, cognitive, and discourse-sensitive methodological approaches to the study of social movements—the focus of this chapter. More specifically, the chapter presents two closely related approaches—discourse

analysis and frame analysis—which are based on similar ontological and epistemological assumptions, but may serve different purposes.

Discourse and frame analysis belong, as indicated, to the same family of analytical frameworks, and both cast an interpretive perspective on the social interaction that constitutes social movement activity, with inspiration from hermeneutics and phenomenology (Schwandt 2000; Yanow 2006). The two approaches share an interest in interpretation and meaning making in activism and social movement communication. To use a catch-phrase from Snow and Benford (1988), the common ambition is to pay attention to movement actors as “signifying agents” who play an active role in interpreting grievances and defining goals, and not just as passive carriers of ideas and ideology. The analytical focus is on how ideas, culture, and ideology are used, interpreted, and spliced together with certain situations or empirical phenomena in order to construct particular ideative patterns through which the world is understood, and which can be used to mobilize support of particular political goals (Donati 1992, 137). This means paying attention to the role of language and the sender–message–receiver communicative relationship when we analyze mobilization and outcomes of social movement activism (Gamson 1998). At times, this triadic relationship has been addressed under the headings of “consensus mobilization” and “resonance” (Snow et al. 1986). No matter the terminology, the idea is to analyze how movement actors through various discursive practices and framing activities attempt to strike chords of existing cultural experiences, narratives, and knowledge within the cognitive landscape of targeted audiences. Thus, both discourse and frame analysis are preoccupied with investigating the relationship between movement “texts” and their broader contexts. In more abstract terms, the combined interest of discourse and frame analysis is the discursive battles over meaning and definition of reality, which play out within and among social movements, and among their friends and foes, often in the public sphere. However, discourse and frame analysis differ in the way they analyze these questions, in the scope of analytical ambition, and often in the degree of strategic rationality ascribed to actors.

The chapter takes the reader step by step through a research design based on discourse or frame analysis, and it looks at the research questions these approaches can shed light on, the epistemological and theoretical assumptions on which the approaches rest, the sampling and data collection of texts to be analyzed, and some reflections on the challenges of actually coding, carrying out, and presenting such in-depth analysis of qualitative material in social movement research. The discussions of possibilities and limitations of the methodologies draw on examples in the social movement literature. I will, in particular, refer to my own research on the protest and mobilization by Danish Muslims during the Muhammad cartoons controversy in 2005–06 (Lindekilde 2008; 2009; Lindekilde and Larsson 2009; Lindekilde, Zapata-Barrero, and

Mouritsen 2009) as well as more recent research, which centers on the discursive battle in public debates and policy communities on where to draw the line between legitimate and democratic activism/protest and problematic, illegitimate, and undemocratic extremism or radicalism (Lindekilde 2012; Lindekilde and Kühle 2012). In each section, I first identify common features among the two related approaches and then highlight and discuss differences between, and particularities of, discourse and frame analysis, respectively.

Discourse and Frame Analysis: What Is It and What Is It Good For in Social Movement Studies?

Despite the similarities between discourse and frame analysis I will distinguish between the two approaches, as they can be used to address slightly different research questions and entail different techniques of coding and analysis. As indicated and substantiated later, discourse and frame analysis share fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions, and they can at times be difficult to distinguish, especially since both, and especially discourse analysis, come in a large number of varieties (for an overview, see Phillips and Hardy 2002). The methodological and theoretical literature disagree on how to define core concepts such as “frame” and “discourse.” Introducing the two perspectives requires some selective choices, and I have chosen to focus on the framing approach developed especially by David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford. This perspective on mobilization and participation has proven analytically fruitful, and it is probably the most common technique for studying cognitive processes of interpretation and meaning making in social movement scholarship. This choice implies that emphasis is put on a version of the framing perspective that has a causal analytical orientation, and that assumes a relatively high degree of strategic rationality in framing processes (see also the following section of this chapter). Among the many variants of discourse analysis, I here focus on Norman Fairclough’s critical variant of discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 2003), which offers a wider perspective on the role of language and cognition in collective action than the framing perspective. “Critical discourse analysis” is a broad and diverse collective of approaches to the study of language, ideology, and power, emphasizing the potential emancipatory force of discourse analysis, and which besides Fairclough counts names such as Ruth Wodak and Teun Van Dijk (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Throughout the chapter, I present aspects of discourse analysis before turning to frame analysis, based on an argument, substantiated later, that frame analysis can be seen as a focused sub-variant of discourse analysis.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: DEFINITION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To define discourse analysis, we first have to address the difficult task of defining what constitutes a “discourse.” Building on Parker (1992), I here define a *discourse* as “an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, which brings an object into being.” The first thing we notice in this definition is the clear social constructivist claim, which stresses the way social reality and phenomena are constructed and given meaning through the articulation and production of texts. The second thing we notice is that a discourse is constituted by an “interrelated” set of texts; that is, “a discourse” refers to large meaning structures, which may lend meaning to individual texts, but constitute an integrated whole. Third, when we talk about “discourse” and indulge in discourse analysis we are not only interested in the manifest and latent meaning articulated in a text, but also in how practices of production, dissemination, and reception helped shape the particular meaning of the text. In Norman Fairclough’s words, studying discourses means paying attention to the interplay between the “discursive unit” (the text), the “discursive practices” (production, dissemination, reception) and the “social practices” (the wider order of discourses in society) (Fairclough 1992). *Discourse analysis* can then be defined as the study of how social reality is linguistically constituted, via analyses of the interplay between texts, discourses, and wider contexts (Phillips and Hardy 2002, 3–4). Put differently, discourse analysis uncovers how particular texts either reproduce or challenge established definitions and understandings of social reality by applying particular discursive practices and drawing on discourses inherent to the social context of reception/consumption of the text.

Social movement studies mainly use discourse analysis to study how movement “texts” (understood broadly as press releases, communiqués, websites, flyers, slogans, media statements, interviews with movement representatives, and so on) are composed and draw on existing discourses in order to communicate particular meanings, and how reception of texts is therefore co-shaped by their discursive context. Discussing the power of social movements, Jeffery Alexander argues that social movements’ power and chances of influence depend on their ability to translate movement-specific grievances (e.g., women’s rights or environmental pollution) into larger, universal discourses of human rights, justice, or risks (Alexander 2006). To resonate and mobilize support, movement actors should connect their specific goals and demands to larger meaning structures (discourses) and infuse individual texts with linguistic “signs” that suggest a particular interpretation. In their research on mobilization and political claims-making of migrants in Europe, Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham show how migrant actors in public debates try to push demands by mimicking the dominant discourse of integration and immigration in particular countries (e.g., republicanism

in France and multiculturalism in Britain), thereby adapting their discourse to the relevant “discursive opportunity structure” (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 2003). Here we see the relevance of discourse analysis in explaining why certain types of arguments are chosen over others in a particular context. Discourse analysis has also been applied to the relationship between forms of state repression and activist mobilization (Davenport et al. 2005; Hess and Martin 2006). Focus has here been on the discursive battle of where to draw the line between legitimate state repression of protests, argued on the basis of law and order discourses, and state repression as illegitimate and disproportionate, drawing on discourses of liberal democracy and human rights. This research highlights, among other things, how the ability to define social reality—make one particular discourse dominant—is an act of power with important implications for social practices. On a similar note, I have used elements of discourse analysis to capture the discursive battle in public debates, and within policy domains, of where to draw the line between legitimate and democratic activism/protest and problematic, illegitimate, and undemocratic extremism or radicalism (Lindekilde 2012; Lindekilde and Kühle 2012). This research shows how a new “radicalization discourse” has established itself among public authorities working with counter-terrorism in Europe since 2006–07. This discourse defines certain fully legal forms of mobilization, protests, and articulated beliefs as problematic and as signs of radicalization, and, thus, as dangerous and in need of repair and intervention. The force of discourse analysis in this context is to show how existing discourses of integration and security are mixed in new policy texts (e.g., national action plans to prevent radicalization), in ways that establish “radicalization” as a potent risk among young people on the margins of society. By simultaneously looking at the actual policy documents, their production, dissemination, and reception, discourse analysis can here address questions of how the “radicalization discourse” has been established, why this is, and what the effects of this new discourse are on groups deemed “radical” or “extremist” (see later).

FRAME ANALYSIS: DEFINITION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Like discourse analysis, frame analysis is preoccupied with how ideas, culture, and ideology are used, interpreted, and spliced together with certain situations or phenomena in order to construct particular ideative patterns through which the world is understood by audiences. Frame analysis is an approach which has taken on a life on its own within social movement studies (originally inspired by the general sociological work of Erving Goffman [1974]), but which is certainly not limited to social movement research. Frame

analysis, and the concept of “frame” and “framing,” is today widely used in the social and behavioral sciences—including communication studies, management and organizational studies, and political psychology—and it takes on different meanings and forms within sub-disciplines. For communication scholars, “framing” happens at many different levels: the sender of the message, such as a social movement organization, frames the message in one way; a journalist may present it in a different frame, paying attention to journalistic professional norms; and the audience again has its own framing of the same message (for an overview, see Entman 1993). For scholars of management decision making and organizational dynamics, framing analysis has been applied to study the behavioral effects of different framings of problems and solutions by managers, often using experimental designs (see the seminal work by Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Within political psychology, frame analysis is a central element of research on opinion and preference formation, studying, for example, the effect of positive and negative framing of political issues on an individual’s willingness to devote resources to the issue (see, e.g., Sniderman and Theriault 2004).

Frame analysis, in the David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford social movement tapping highlighted here, focuses directly on the causal questions of movement participation and mobilization. It does so more than discourse analysis and other variants of frame analysis within and outside social movement studies. Frame analysis as presented here zooms in on how particular ideas/ideologies are used deliberately to mobilize supporters and demobilize adversaries vis-à-vis a particular goal (Snow and Benford 1988). Frame analysis has been said to deconstruct ideology in the study of collective action—to open up the black box of ideology in explaining mobilization (Snow and Byrd 2007). It focuses on how more or less established ideological constructs are used strategically to frame a particular topic—like a picture frame that accentuates certain things, hides others, and borders off reality in a certain way. In comparison to discourse analysis, frame analysis highlights the strategic and deliberative side of language usage of movement actors (for a critique of this strategic perspective on framing in social movement studies, see Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Likewise, we might say that where discourse analysis looks at how an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception bring an object into being, frame analysis looks at how existing “objects” or “topics” are framed by different actors, bending their meaning in certain directions. Discourse analysis could, for example, be effectively applied to understand how “radicalization” was established as a relatively new social phenomenon and loaded with a particular meaning, and frame analysis could be applied more narrowly to investigate how, for example, “Islam” was framed by various actors in debates on radicalization. In the forms presented here, frame analysis is less ambitious than discourse analysis in terms of uncovering the process of social construction of reality,

but more targeted in terms of explaining the effect of the more manifest content of texts on mobilization and participation.

According to Goffman, we can define a “frame” as mental scripts for recognizing occurrences and events within one’s life space, which organize/identify experience and guide perception and action (Goffman 1974, 21). Goffman argued that frames are essential to all kinds of perceptions of the world and, thus, to everyday interaction and communication. In this perspective, frames 1) focus attention—what “is in frame” and “out of frame;” 2) combine elements of the scene so that one set of meanings rather than another is conveyed; and 3) transform aspects of social reality, for example from routine grievances or misfortunes to injustice in need of action (Snow 2004, 384–5). In Goffman’s perspective, frames are elements of an individual’s or a group’s culture and lived experiences, and therefore relatively stable. This idea was later developed by Pierre Bourdieu in his conceptualization of “habitus” and its importance in the reproduction of social distinctions (Bourdieu 1990).

Within social movement studies this perspective, stressing how the choice of interpretative frames is guided by culture, habits, and norms, has continued to be influential (see Gamson 1988; 1998; Goodwin and Jasper 1999). However, the fundamental idea of a frame as an everyday interpretive script was developed and given a twist in the direction of explaining collective action by especially David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988). Like Goffman, they argued that what they called “collective actions frames” function by focusing attention, combining events, situations, and social facts, and transforming the understanding of aspects of social reality, but they put more emphasis on the agentic and innovative side of “framing”—the conscious signifying work carried out by social movement actors. Here frames are deliberately applied and intended to mobilize supporters and demobilize opponents of a given cause. Studying “framing” means investigating the cognitive process that goes prior to the actual frame we encounter in movement texts by investigating social movement actors’ interaction in the preparatory phase of a campaign or protest event through, for example, participant observations (Snow et al. 1986; Mattoni 2012).

Summing up, we can say that collective action frames are deliberately crafted “symbols,” which offer a full package of meaning (Donati 1992). Or put differently, collective action frames actively close down ambiguities of interpretation of particular social phenomena by activating larger discourses or subsets of properties that situate the phenomenon in a particular light. Thus, framing becomes a strategic attempt to guide the activation of particular discourses and repertoires of understanding with the purpose of mobilizing consensus.

In social movement studies, the frame analysis approach has been applied to research questions where “frames/framing” are treated as both

independent and dependent variable. Some studies of how particular frames come about and change over time, for example in response to state repression, use collective action frames as dependent variable (Zuo and Benford 1995). Many studies combine an interest in the ideological origins of frames with an interest in the framing process by which political and religious ideologies have been used strategically to mobilize supporters and demobilize adversaries (Koopmans and Statham 1999; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Ferree et al. 2002; Snow and Byrd 2007). One important aspect of this research has been to show how the same ideology can be used to frame the same phenomenon in different—at times contrasting—ways by stressing different aspects of the ideational structure. In my own research on the mobilization of Danish Muslims in response to the publication of the Muhammad cartoons, I show, based on aspects of frame analysis, how different Muslim actors used Islam to argue both for and against protesting the cartoons (Lindekilde 2008; 2009). Likewise, by comparing Muslim framing of the cartoons in different arenas (internally in the Muslim community versus in the public sphere) I made the “strategicness” of Muslim framing an empirical question, arguing that variation in Muslim frames between arenas was partly due to strategic adaptation to different audiences (Lindekilde 2013; see also later). Frame analysis has also addressed “frame disputes” and the relative positioning of social movement organizations in a particular field (Lindekilde 2008; della Porta, Caiani, and Wagemann 2012). Studies investigating collective action frames as independent variables typically focus on how framing has affected movement outcomes, in terms of both mobilization success and political impact (see, e.g., Cress and Snow 1996; Koopmans and Statham 1999). Such studies often rely on the concept of “resonance” (Snow and Benford 1988) to measure and discuss the degree to which framing succeeds in striking a cord of responsiveness in the target group or in the public at large. In my research on the Muhammad cartoons controversy, I argue how some Muslim representatives’ framing of the cartoons as deliberate provocation and harm resonated well among Danish Muslims in the light of lived experiences with the political climate in Denmark vis-à-vis Islam. In contrast, other Muslim representatives’ framing of the cartoons as unpleasant but unavoidable use of free speech resonated well among central actors of the political elite. Other studies take a step back and argue that the impact of framing on mobilization has to do, not only with resonance building, but also with the ability to frame “political opportunities”—that is, to identify and articulate political developments as opportunities for action and change (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Used in this way the frame analysis perspective can inform the study of timing of political protest.

Research Design: Theoretical Implications, Conceptualization, and Case Selection

Before moving on to the details of designing a research project building on either discourse or frame analysis—paying attention to issues of conceptualization, case selection, and data collection—a few words on the common theoretical implications of working with either perspective are appropriate.

Both discourse and frame analysis are fundamentally social constructivist and interpretive perspectives on social movement activity, offering quite different views on mobilization than, say, structural strain theory or Marxist views on the role of ideas in social and historical development (Snow and Soule 2010, 50–51). Activists participate in constructing meaning. They are not just carriers of ideas/ideology, and the relationship between ideas, social structures, and action is not one of determinism, but rather one of contingency. Collective grievances and demands do not flow automatically from social structures and strain, but come into existence partly through processes of interpretation, discursive practices, and active meaning making. Discourses and frames are partly constituted by the social and material world, but partly also constitute these spheres (Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, 29). The focus is on the dialectic relationship between concrete “speech acts” and their socio-material context. This also entails the important theoretical point that in the context of discourse and frame analysis meaning is contingent and never completely fixed, although there is disagreement about how fixed it is. The meaning of a given empirical phenomenon varies and transforms over time and across different contexts. Comparative research on the publication of the Muhammad cartoons and subsequent mobilization of protest shows that the cartoons came to represent quite different things to similar actors in different countries and at different moments in time (e.g., before and after the violent escalation of the controversy in the Middle East) (Lindekilde 2009; Lindekilde and Larsson 2009; Lindekilde, Zapata-Barrero and Mouritsen 2009). Thus, grievance interpretation and mobilization can only be understood contextually and holistically. Finally, I want to stress a theoretical implication that follows from engaging with discourse or frame analysis, namely the tendency towards processual and mechanistic views on social reality entailed in both explanatory and more descriptive studies of discourses and framing. What matters is not so much whether, but how ideas matter.

This fundamentally dynamic, dialectic, and processual perspective on social reality and meaning construction is reflected in the conceptualization of discourse and frame analysis to which I now turn.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: CONCEPTUALIZATION

In conceptualizing his critical approach to discourse analysis, Norman Fairclough draws inspiration from linguistics, micro-sociological analysis of everyday interactions, and macro-sociological analysis of social structures and power. Figure 9.1 illustrates his conceptualization of discourse analysis. As indicated by this figure, Fairclough’s conceptualization of discursive practices—the production, distribution, and consumption of particular discourses in a given context—serves as the link between concrete texts or discursive units (e.g., movements’ communiques, flyers, banners, websites, media statements, and so on) and the wider structure of social practices in society. Fairclough talks about the “order of discourse” as the structure of social practices, where the “order of discourse” refers to the sum of discourse types and their internal positioning within a given social institution (e.g., a particular movement) or social domain (e.g., the welfare state). The two-headed arrow in Figure 9.1 illustrates the theoretical and analytical point that any text is locked in a dynamic relationship with the larger social context in which it is produced and consumed, and that discourses are at the same time constituted by and constitute social reality. Discourses are thus socially embedded, and a text is always shaped by and reshapes existing discourses. Through discursive practices the order of discourse is either reproduced or challenged (or both). When social movement actors use various existing discursive genres, like the ad, in innovative ways or invent new ones, like street happenings, and combine these practices with innovative mixes

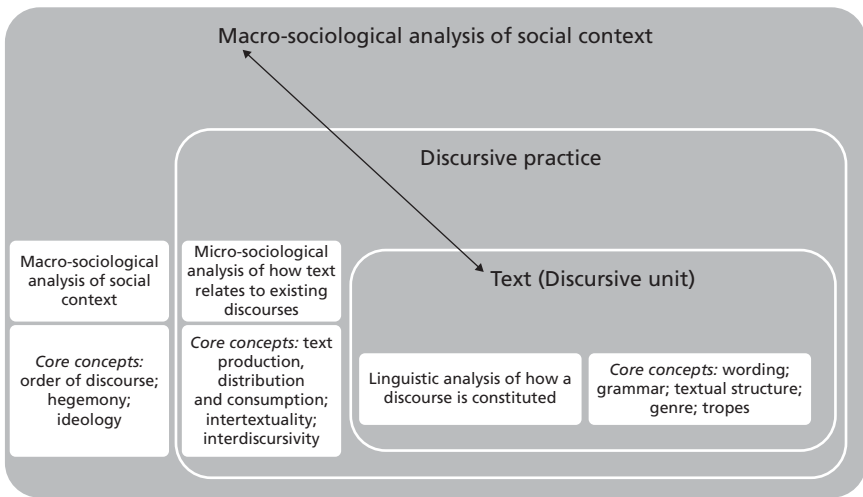


Figure 9.1 Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

Source: Building on Fairclough 1992, 73.

of discourses, they can at times challenge and change the order of discourse. Such changes in the order of discourses would then be reflected in partly new opportunities and constraints on subsequent discursive practices in the field. At the same time, basic genre and media-specific norms of textual compositions, wording, etc. between, for example, tweets, blog-posts, press releases, flyers, and political speeches evolve slowly, and social movement actors will have to pay continuous attention to these basic scripts in order to make communication effective.

In Fairclough's perspective, doing discourse analysis means looking at all the three levels of analysis in Figure 9.1 (1992, 2003). If we are interested in a particular social movement's or organization's discursive universe we must scrutinize: 1) the characteristics of the particular text(s) in terms of wording (What nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc., and why these?), grammar (What tense and person, and why?), textual composition/genre (Academic style of composition and argument? Spoken language composition?), and use of literary tropes (What metaphors, metonymies, etc. and why?); 2) the text's production (Where does the text come from? How was it produced?), distribution (How was the text distributed to its readers? Through what media?), and consumption (How is the text interpreted by audiences? Who reads it?); and 3) impact of the text on the order of discourse (Reproduction or challenge?) and the effect on wider social practices (power relations, social differentiation, social integration, and so on). By integrating these different levels of analysis, discourse analysis can help us understand the connections between the discursive practices of social movement activists and wider social and cultural developments and change.

Social movements are often defined in terms of their creative and unconventional action repertoires, and their challenges to existing "systems of authority," be it states, international organizations, multinational companies, or ideologies (Snow and Soule 2010, 7–19). From the perspective of discourse analysis, social movements are engaged in innovative and creative forms of discursive practices, which pose a challenge to or reproduce the existing order of discourse in a given institution or social domain. By mixing existing discourses in new ways (inter-discursivity) or drawing on prior texts in new ways (inter-textuality), social movement activists often attempt to destabilize or stabilize social, political, and cultural structures and power relations in society at large or social domains in particular. The American civil rights movement's success in dismantling racial segregation was partially due to the ability of prominent leaders to mix discourses of human rights with Christian discourse in ways that posed a potent challenge to dominant perceptions of racial justice and equality (McAdam 1996). At the level of social practices, Fairclough talks (inspired by Althusser and Gramsci) about "hegemonic discourse" as the dominant discourse in a particular order of discourse. Thus, a hierarchy or system of dominance exists among different discourses, which

can be challenged or reproduced by particular texts and discursive practices. A constant battle over dominance in defining social reality is unfolding, and texts should be analyzed in the light of this ongoing power struggle. For example, Rita Noonan shows how women in Chile during the Pinochet era were able to mobilize and obtain political power by challenging the regime from within the dominant discourse on motherhood and family values (1995). The study exemplifies how the challenge to the discursive order under circumstance of repression can be implicit and indirect.

Texts and discourses can be more or less “ideological,” meaning that they may or may not deliberately aim to maintain or transform power relations within a given social institution or social domain. One way of drawing the line between discourse analysis and frame analysis is to say that where the ideological status of text and discourse is an empirical question to discourse analysis, the deliberate, ideological nature of social movement communication is often presupposed within frame analysis (although this be empirically investigated, as mentioned earlier). The starting point of frame analysis is that discursive practices of movement actors are designed to mobilize adherents and de-mobilize opponents to either challenge or reassure the social order. Thus, the aim is to show how ideology works in practice, and that social movements can be conceptualized as “ideologically structured action” (Zald 2000).

FRAME ANALYSIS: CONCEPTUALIZATION

As indicated, “collective action frames” focus attention, articulate, and transform particular interpretations and meanings of particular social objects or phenomena in order to mobilize or de-mobilize constituencies. The process of “framing” thus refers to the conscious signifying work carried out by social movement actors. The process of framing entails “frame articulation,” which involves the connection of events, experiences, and strands of ideology so that they stick together in an integrated and meaningful fashion (Snow 2004, 400). Frame articulation means highlighting particular issues, events, and ideas and their connectedness instead of others, and thereby helps to mobilize consensus and action (Snow et al. 1986).

In one of their paradigmatic articles on framing, David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford argued (1988) that any social movement actor involved in mobilization and therefore the attempt to move people “from the balcony to the barricades” on a particular issue has to attend to three “core framing tasks”—“diagnostic,” “prognostic,” and “motivational” framing (this tripartition of framing tasks, however, originates in John Wilson’s discussion of the function of ideology in social movements [1973]). Table 9.1 summarizes the three core framing tasks and provides an example:

Table 9.1 Description and Exemplification of the Three Core Framing Tasks

Diagnostic framing	Prognostic framing	Motivational framing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Description:</i> the identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality • <i>Example:</i> al-Qaeda blaming “Western oriented elites” or “crusaders” as the root of all evil in Muslim societies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Description:</i> the proposed solution to the identified problem. The indication of strategies, tactics, and goals • <i>Example:</i> al-Qaeda’s “jihad by the sword” against the “crusader alliance” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Description:</i> the indication of a rationale for action. Motivational frames are registers of motives for action • <i>Example:</i> al-Qaeda’s attempt to make violent jihad against “the crusaders” a religious duty for individual Muslims

Source: Drawing on Snow and Benford 1988; Snow and Byrd 2007.

Diagnostic and prognostic framing is geared towards “consensus mobilization”—creating a shared picture of problem and solution—while motivational framing is aimed at “action mobilization,” pushing collective action on the basis of shared perceptions (Snow and Benford 1988, 202). Action mobilization does not follow directly from consensus mobilization, so social movement actors must attend to all three framing tasks at once, and the success of the framing is dependent on how elaborate, refined, and integrated the core elements of framing are. Research on al-Qaeda’s framing activities suggests, for example, that while many Muslims share al-Qaeda’s diagnosis, few are convinced by the legitimacy of the prognosis and the motivational framing (Sedgwick 2010).

Snow and Benford argue that when individual frames become linked in congruency and complementarity, “frame alignment” occurs (Snow et al. 1986, 464). Social movement actors make strategic use of frame alignment mechanisms in order to create “resonance” of their framing among potential adherents. Resonance occurs when frames successfully “speak to” individuals’ existing perceptions and situation, and make them responsive to the content of the message. Snow and Benford introduce four types of frame alignment strategies, which can be engaged in the framing activities of social movement actors, namely “frame bridging,” “frame amplification,” “frame extension,” and “frame transformation.” *Frame bridging* is the “linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow et al. 1986, 467). This is the case when al-Qaeda leaders try to link the general diagnostic framing of the miserable situation in many Muslim countries, which cast the situation as the fault of the West and corrupt elites, to the situation of experienced discrimination and repression among Muslims in the West. Frame bridging involves the linkage of a movement to “unmobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters” (Snow et al. 1986, 467). *Frame amplification* refers to “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame

that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events” (Snow et al. 1986, 469). This interpretive frame usually involves invigoration of certain values or beliefs. When al-Qaeda stresses jihad as an offensive doctrine and an individual obligation, it stresses one particular interpretation of this religious principle rather than others. *Frame extensions* are a movement’s effort to incorporate participants by extending the boundaries of the proposed frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of targeted groups. When radical Islamic groups in the West turn issues of great importance to young Muslims, such as drinking, sexual practices, education, and work, into questions about “true believing” and “Western decadence,” which should be avoided and actively fought, they engage in frame extension. Finally, *frame transformation* is required when the proposed frames “may not resonate with, and on occasion may even appear antithetical to, conventional lifestyles or rituals and extant interpretive frames” (Snow et al. 1986, 473). At an individual level such sweeping frame transformations are rare, but are seen when, for example, converts to radical Islamic groups retrospectively interpret their life as “immoral” or “blinded” in the light of their new outlook. Likewise, it has been argued that the process of group radicalization can be understood as a process of unfolding collective frame transformation, where former frames are transformed or replaced, for example by more radical prognostic framing (Sprinzak 1990; della Porta 1995).

The spread of new social media (Twitter, Facebook, and so on) as a tool of social movement activists has raised the question whether these new forms of direct, fast, and personalized communication can be studied using the traditional conceptualization of framing or whether new concepts are necessary. Bennett and Segerberg have outlined the logic of this new form of “connective action,” suggesting the need to consider “personal action frames” as a supplement/alternative to “collective action frames” in self-organizing networks like *Occupy Wall Street* or *Los Indignados* (2012).

In contrast to discourse analysis, frame analysis does not include an analytical perspective on micro-level linguistics (wording, grammar, and so on). Nevertheless, the concepts of the core framing tasks serve to identify the constituting building blocks of a particular frame (Noakes and Johnston 2005). Like discourse analysis, frame analysis offers an analytical tool to grasp the discursive practices of particular actors; that is, the ways particular texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. At this level of analysis there are obvious affinities between, for example, the concepts of “inter-discursivity” and some of the strategies of “frame alignment.” Likewise, discourse analysis and frame analysis are comparable in their ambition to analyze the dynamic relationship between texts and their wider social, cultural, and political context. The concept of “resonance,” and related concepts introduced to deal with barriers to resonance building (see Snow and Benford 1988, 205–13), provide an analytical grip to this relationship. In recent years, a concept has developed

in frame analysis-oriented studies of social movements, which bears some resemblance to Fairclough's "order of discourse," namely "discursive opportunity structures" (Koopmans and Olzak 2004; McCammon et al. 2007). Drawing on the concept of "political opportunity structures," it suggests that the space in which movement actors operate is structured, not only in terms of political institutional design and power distributions, but also in terms of predominant discourses of political culture and so on. A particular institution or social domain thus harbors a certain discursive opportunity structure, which guides the discursive practices of actors in the field by suggesting which frames might successfully build resonance and which ones will appear as challenging.

Despite the similarities in conceptualization between the highlighted variants of discourse and frame analysis, the differences in analytical scope (analyzing how social phenomena are constituted versus analyzing how extant social phenomena are framed) and assumptions about the nature of discursive practices (partly unconscious versus dominantly strategic) should be retained and kept in mind. Not least, these differences have implications for case selection and data collection.

CASE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

As in all research designs, case selection and data collection strategy in discourse and frame analysis depends on the research question. In social movement studies, elements of discourse and frame analysis have been integrated in single case studies, comparative case studies, longitudinal studies, and cross-sectional (survey) studies, as well as in combinations of these designs. However, more often than not the approaches have been used in rather intensive research designs with the ambition to go in depth rather than to generalize. This tendency is more common in discourse analysis than in frame analysis.

Generally speaking, discourse and frame analysis use qualitative material or texts (in its broadest sense) as data. Anything that is written, can be translated into text, or whose symbolic meaning can be analyzed can be the basis of discourse or frame analysis. In social movement studies such data corpus often includes movement communiques, websites, press releases, media statements, flyers, brochures, slogans, transcribed interviews, field notes, pictures, videos, and monuments. Here visuals, including art works, have been analyzed as "framing devices" of frames (Noakes and Johnston 2005). However, in practical research an interest in pictures, symbols, and monuments often leads researchers towards discourse analysis rather than frame analysis (Doerr and Milman 2014). The advance of new communication technologies,

in particular the spread of Web 2.0 social media platforms, has created a wealth of new data sources for the study of collective action frames. Likewise, data collection for frame analysis has in recent years been made considerably easier given increased digitalization. A fast-growing amount of qualitative material produced by movement activists or about movement activities produced by, for example, journalists is retained and stored digitally, and accessible to researchers through a few clicks.

Whether they choose discourse or frame analysis, researchers are likely to have difficulty defining the relevant population of texts to be included in the study. The problem has to do with determining the sampling unit and the unit of analysis. The sampling unit of concrete research is often the public debate of a particular topic (nuclear energy, poverty, abortion, the Muhammad cartoons, and so on), within which the discourses or framing of involved actors are investigated (see, e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Lindekilde 2008). Often the sampling unit is particular movement actors—particular “voices”—who have been at the center of attention, for example the Chinese student movement (Zuo and Benford 1995), right-wing groups in the United States (Snow and Miller 2003), and the American civil rights movement (McAdam 1982, 1996). In any of these cases, the unit of analysis is typically not a particular discourse or frame, but rather individual “acts of language” or “discursive units,” such as individual, whole texts (typical for discourse analysis) or excerpts (more typical with frame analysis).

In the following section, these general considerations and dilemmas of case selection and data collection are substantiated and specified vis-à-vis discourse and frame analysis respectively.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: CASE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

Given the ambition of discourse analysis of analyzing and understanding in detail how particular discourses are constituted and bringing certain social phenomena into existence, discourse analysis is most often linked to small-n studies based on theoretical/intentional selection of cases. As indicated, the ambition of discourse analysis is detailed in-depth analysis, paying attention to micro-level linguistics, discursive practices, and their relation to wider social practices, rather than a broad study. Therefore the selection of cases is restricted to one or a few cases (particular actors or debates), and within these cases data collection is often restricted to a few exemplary or central texts (such as programmatic communiques by movements actors, central speeches by leaders and others), or a small sample of such texts. Discourse analysis can also be carried out, for example, using transcripts of interviews

with movement leaders as data, looking at how individual discourses relate to the order of discourses in a given context/domain. However, in practice, the analytical framework would then often be modified and include elements of narrative analysis, semiotics, or grounded theory (see Mattoni 2014).

Texts are sampled intentionally on the basis of being particularly informative vis-à-vis the discourse of interest. For example, when I analyzed the development of the discourse of radicalization in Denmark, I chose to focus on a programmatic policy plan from 2009, which defined the context for radicalization prevention work in Denmark. However, sampling may also include elements of randomized representative sampling as when, for example, sub-samples of texts are collected in a representative way within specified periods of time as a way to systematically analyze discourse transformations across time (Berbrier 1998). Introducing such sampling techniques to discourse analysis is a way of boosting the external validity (generalizability) of the study.

The ability to generalize based on small-n discourse analysis is generally low, but the internal validity of such studies is often relatively high. Internal validity has to do with the quality of the causal explanation of a given study (Munck and Verkuilen 2005). I have argued that discourse analysis is more descriptive and geared towards understanding than it is towards explanation. But if we view causality in a more processual and mechanistic way, which would be in accordance with the epistemological assumptions of discourse analysis, we can argue that discourse analysis provides explanations of how particular meanings are constituted—and discourse analysis can be quite effective in providing such processual explanations. Discourse analysis is rarely combined with traditional causal explanations of X causes Y, and, thus with attempts at investigating relevant third variables (controlling).

FRAME ANALYSIS: CASE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION

In contrast to discourse analysis, frame analysis within social movement studies often entails an ambition to explain, for example, why some movement or organization was able to build resonance and mobilize large constituencies while others were not. This explanatory ambition often leads frame analysts to work with more cases—medium- to large-n studies—which, for example, allow them to make systematic comparisons of similarities and differences in framing strategies and constituency mobilization among different actors in a field (Cress and Snow 1996; Lindeskilde 2009). Case selection is theoretical/intentional and may be based on the logic of “most similar system designs” (see Ritter 2014), which by selecting cases that are relevant on a number of relevant third variables (e.g., organizational size, resources, political context),

but different in terms of framing strategies and mobilization success, can give the opportunity to “isolate” and investigate the effect of framing strategies on mobilization outcomes. Such case selection boosts the internal validity of framing studies.

In terms of data collection, sampling is, more often than with discourse analysis, oriented towards securing some degree of external validity. This means making use of representative sampling techniques and working with relatively large numbers of units of analysis. One way is “population studies”—that is, the framing strategies of a particular actor are studied by sampling and analyzing all texts produced by that actor. However, in practice this is often not achievable due to the very large amounts of relevant material in which case representative sampling must be carried out. This can be done by sampling texts by representative actors in the movement or randomized sampling in particular arenas or time periods. Frame analysis can typically handle more units of analysis as the techniques, for example the identification of core framing elements, refer to excerpts and not whole texts, as in discourse analysis.

Let’s say that we in a research project are interested in the way different Muslim actors framed the events of the cartoon crisis in Denmark in 2005–06 (see Lindekilde 2008, 2009; Lindekilde and Larsson 2009). When sampling material for such a project, the frame analyst faces the challenge of how explicitly the particular topic or object of research—here the Muhammad cartoons—should be mentioned in the material to be relevant for sampling (see Donati 1992 for a similar point). Should we only include text (including audio and video) in which Muslim actors explicitly mention the Muhammad cartoons or other texts with more indirect references as well? If we choose the first strategy we secure a high degree of reliability in our data collection, but may miss important aspects of Muslims’ framing of the affair, and vice versa. The actual sampling strategy will depend on the research question, but it is generally a dangerous strategy to rely solely on the presence of particular “key words” or “search terms” when sampling texts for frame analysis in the variant discussed here.

How to Analyze and Present Data Using Discourse and Frame Analysis?

In this last part of the chapter, I discuss how to analyze and present data using discourse and frame analysis, and give concrete examples of how to apply the techniques in social movement studies. Again, I first present common considerations regarding data analysis and data presentation, including reflections

on inductive versus deductive coding strategies, computer software, and the use of displays in aiding analysis and presenting and documenting results, and then give examples of analysis using the conceptualization of discourse and frame analysis given earlier.

A particularly vivid challenge to both discourse and frame analysis, and any other in-depth analysis of qualitative material, is to validate and document the scholar's interpretations. The challenge is to convince others that one's identification and interpretation of a particular "diagnostic frame" and "frame bridge" or type of "order of discourse" and "inter-discursivity" are valid and reliable. We must also live up to the general research criteria of "replicability,"—that is, our readers should in principle be able to check and replicate our analysis. One way to ensure that these research criteria are met is to apply systematic coding procedures to our texts—that is, to carefully define our codes and analytical categories in advance, describing them and their usage in a codebook, which is then applied to the sampled material. This would only work in deductive research designs, however. When I analyzed Danish Muslim actors' framing of the Muhammad cartoons, I used the core framing elements (diagnosis, prognosis, motivation) as theoretically deduced coding categories, which were defined in advance and then applied to all the material. However, at times our research is more inductive, and interested not so much in predefined theoretical categories, but in "what the data tells us on its own." In a study on radicalization of political participation I was interested in how young Muslims talked about and combined ideas of democracy, jihad, political participation, human rights, and sharia as a way of informing academic debates about how to define radicalization (Lindekilde and Kühle 2009). Collected material was coded inductively (resembling the strategy of "grounded theory;" see Mattoni 2014), and the coding book was thus empty to start with and produced as the research was being conducted. Deductive and inductive coding strategies are often combined in practice. For example, the core framing elements of Danish Muslims' framing of the Muhammad cartoons were identified deductively, but the further specification of sub-variants of diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framings were found inductively. No matter the strategy of coding, the point is to be explicit about procedures and to document them, for example by giving access to the codebook.

Another way to improve the reliability and measurement validity of discourse and frame analysis is by further systematizing the analysis and coding of data by using one of the many computer software packages, like *Nvivo* or *Atlas.ti*, designed to aid the analysis of qualitative material. The advantages of such software are many. When working with large numbers of units of analysis it is often practical to have more people code the material. This is obviously a further challenge to the reliability of the study as different coders might not agree exactly on how to apply the different codes. Here the computer software may help conduct inter-coder (and intra-coder) reliability tests, providing a

measure of the accordance among coders. Furthermore, the computer programs are a huge help when we want to combine textual and visual material, as the software allows us to store the different types of material side by side.

Finally, a last strategy for improving the reliability and documenting the analysis of qualitative material is by using “displays” (Miles and Huberman 1994). A display can be defined as a “condensed, visual depiction of qualitative data, which facilitates analysis and helps detect patterns/trends/themes” (Dahler-Larsen 2012). Displays can solve two general problems in reporting qualitative analysis, including discourse and frame analysis, by making sure that 1) the presentation of analytical results does not drown in a long text, providing a lot of context, but little documentation and description of overall trends, patterns, and results; and 2) the move between data and conclusions is not glossed over in the presentation of results. By presenting the results of a discourse or frame analysis in display format, be it a matrix display (tables that present cross-tabulations of codes) or a network display (graphs/figures that depict the flow of events and processes of connection between coding categories), we can keep these challenges to the transparency of our analysis at bay (for an example of the use of displays, see Lindekilde 2009 and later paragraphs).

When it comes to reporting and publishing results of discourse and frame analysis within social movement research, we see that the results of both techniques have found their way to highly regarded specialized movement journals and book series. There is a tendency (identified on the basis of general knowledge of the literature rather than systematic investigation) that studies of movement discourses are published more often outside specialized movement scholar outlets than studies of movement framing (e.g., Rochon 1998). This probably has to do with the compartmentalized nature of frame analysis in different sub-disciplines in the social sciences, where the social movement perspective on framing highlighted here is quite particular to the field. One exception here is when frame analysis of movement communication is combined with techniques of quantitative content analysis, such as political claims analysis, in which case results have been published more broadly (e.g., Koopmans and Statham 1999). Likewise, a tendency can be identified that suggests that studies using discourse analysis on movement communication are published as single-authored monographs, while studies applying frame analysis are more often published as co-authored journal articles, especially if they include national comparisons (e.g., Lindekilde and Larsson 2009). This pattern of reporting and publication can be seen as the effect of methodological choices, in as much as detailed discourse analysis often demands more space for reporting, and is less easily conducted by multiple coders, than frame analysis. However, these patterns are very tentative.

DOING DISCOURSE ANALYSIS—AN EXAMPLE

I will use one of my own studies as an example of the application of discourse analysis in the Fairclough tapping described in this chapter. The study investigated the establishment and nature of the “radicalization discourse” in Denmark since 2007–08, when radicalization became a very hot topic in the media, among academics and among policy makers, in part due to examples of “home-grown terrorists” in Denmark. In particular, the study was interested in how the radicalization discourse was established in policy circles to legitimize spending huge amounts of money on developing and implementing radicalization prevention policies (the following draws on Lindekilde 2010, 2012; Lindekilde and Kühle 2009).

The study was initially based on a detailed discourse analysis of one document published in January 2009 called *A Common and Safe Future* (Ministry of Foreigners, Immigration and Integration 2009), which is the Danish government’s action plan to combat radicalization and extremism among young people. This choice was based on an argument that this text represented a programmatic statement of the radicalization discourse in Denmark, which established the framework of national as well as local efforts to prevent radicalization of political activism. The action plan is 31 pages and consists of an introduction, which defines the terms of “extremism” and “radicalization” and provides an understanding of the radicalization process, followed by the description of seven key areas of intervention, specified in 22 concrete proposals for radicalization prevention efforts.

I applied Fairclough’s three-level model and conceptual framework of discourse analysis to the Danish radicalization action plan. I coded the material using *Nvivo* and following a predominantly inductive coding strategy, producing categories/codes of central words, metaphors, types of causes, types of solutions, genres, signs of inter-discursivity, challenges to the order of discourse, and other observations as the analysis unfolded. The first step was to look at how the radicalization discourse was constituted linguistically in the text, through choice of wording, verb tenses, noun articles, argument style, metaphors, and so on. As far as the key term “radicalization” (sometimes called the “nodal point” of a discourse, Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 112) goes, and how it is filled with meaning in the text via connections to certain words and phrases, I will mention at least five analytical points here. First, radicalization is conceptualized as a gradual process unfolding in phases. This particular understanding flows from connecting radicalization with words like “gradual,” “stepwise,” “unfolding,” “slippery slope,” and so on. Second, it is established through recurrent use of words and phrases like “vulnerable individuals,” “seeking youngsters,” “insecure individuals,” and others that radicalization is a phenomenon of individuals, rather than groups, in particular young men on the fringes of society. Third, the text constructs radicalization

as both a cognitive and a behavioral process. On the one hand, radicalization is constituted by “extreme ideas,” “totalitarian ideologies,” “intolerance,” “undemocratic beliefs,” and “us-and-them distinctions.” On the other hand, radicalization is described as including particular types of actions such as “the use of violent or undemocratic means,” “attempts at undermining the democratic order of society,” “the use of threats,” and “terrorism.” Fourth, the reasons for radicalization are many and interacting, including the search for “identity and belonging,” “experiences of injustice and discrimination,” “foreign affairs,” “radical entrepreneurs and other negative influences,” and “the creation of parallel societies and ghettos.” Finally, further radicalization in Danish society could be prevented through “early, multi-dimensional and coordinated interventions,” “providing positive alternatives,” “challenging and supporting youngsters in trouble,” and “developing Denmark as a democratic society with freedom, responsibility, equality and possibilities for all.” These goals are subsequently meant to be obtained via the 22 specified initiatives. In sum, radicalization is constructed, via particular words and phrases, as a gradual, individual, cognitive, and behavioral development towards the extreme, which is caused by multiple factors in interaction, and which can be prevented through carefully designed interventions.

The micro-level linguistic constitution of the radicalization discourse was further specified by analyzing the use of verb tenses and noun articles. The text is filled with passive verb constructions that give it a scientific and distant feel and create “truisms” where developments and processes become natural and inevitable. Thus, “youngsters radicalize,” “possibilities disappear,” and “extremism spreads” as naturally as the seasons change. It is clear that with such unavoidable processes at play, radicalization prevention efforts become a must. Furthermore, the extensive use of past tense, especially in the beginning of the text, creates a picture of radicalization as a growing problem by comparing the present and the past. The text is basically telling a story of increased risks and a society in decay. The Danish government is without exception referred to with the definite article—“the government.” This form signals resolve, action, and will. In contrast, the targets of radicalization prevention—the objects of governance—are referred to using the indefinite plural form—“youngsters,” “left- and right-wing extremists,” “Muslims,” “extreme groups,” and so on, with “Muslims” as the most frequently mentioned group.

A final step in the linguistic analysis of the discursive unit was to look at the usage of metaphors. I will only discuss the most dominant one here, the metaphor of virology, which links the process of radicalization to the semantic domain of virology. Metaphors work by making the unknown known by invoking our knowledge of domains that are often far removed from the topic at hand (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Thus, the process of radicalization and the development of extremism in society are described as a process of

“contamination,” where “vulnerable” individuals without the right kind of “protective defense system” become infected with radical ideas through “contact” with radical entrepreneurs. The metaphor of virology is powerful in shaping our understanding of radicalization and the possibilities of intervention and “curing.”

At the second level of Fairclough’s analytical model—discursive practices—we first look at how the government action plan was produced. According to the prescript, the plan is the product of a cross-ministerial collaboration, including the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreigners, Immigration and Integration, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This cross-sectional perspective is further underlined by a number of intertextual references to initiatives and policy papers in other domains, which the radicalization prevention plan will supplement, draw upon, or substitute. This leads to a fundamental point of the analysis: the radicalization discourse is largely constituted by and held in place by the innovative mixing of two pre-existing discourses (inter-discursivity) that were formerly separated, at least in terms of policy making, namely the “discourse of integration” and the “discourse of security.” The integration discourse is preoccupied with the (lack of) integration of immigrants and other minorities in society, and is in the text connected to terms like “social cohesion,” “parallel societies,” “common values,” “citizenship,” “inclusion,” and so on. The security discourse is anchored in the domains of security services, the police, and the military, and focuses on societal security and stability. In the text, this discourse is marked by the extensive use of words like “security,” “risk,” “threats,” “fight,” “battle,” “secure,” and so on. My point in the analysis is that linking these two pre-existing discourses in the text helps formulate the basis for a new policy field in the intersection between integration and security politics. The mixing of the two discourses is seen already in the title of the document “A *common and safe* future” (my italics). Mixing the two discourses construes radicalization in a particular light—in which the lack of integration becomes a potential security problem. In the radicalization discourse, people who pose a challenge in terms of labor market, educational, housing, or value integration also pose a potential security challenge because lacking integration is theorized as a cause of radicalization in the discourse. Those “at risk” become “risky.” It is obvious that this blending of discourses has consequences in terms of constructing particular groups in society, in particular young Muslim immigrants, as “suspect communities” (see also Schiffauer 2008; Mythen et al. 2009).

How is this message interpreted and consumed? I investigated this through qualitative interviews with the main target groups of the radicalization discourse and the government action plan. I interviewed “street-level bureaucrats” (school teachers and social workers), who are the immediate target group of many initiatives in the action plan as they will implement efforts

to identify signs of radicalization, for example. In addition, I interviewed young, neo-orthodox Salafi-inspired Muslims whom the radicalization discourse, rightly or wrongly, often perceives as candidates for radicalization. The interviews with street-level bureaucrats reflected some reservations about the radicalization discourse and the task of “spotting” signs of radicalization. Likewise, the interviews with young Muslims in the target group indicated some quite negative reactions to the securitization of integration and the creation of Muslims as suspect communities. To some extent, the radicalization discourse was thus met with counter-discourses suggesting alternative conceptualizations, problems, and potentially counter-productive consequences.

The final level of investigation in Fairclough’s model is the analysis of whether or not the discursive unit (here the Danish radicalization action plan) reproduces or challenges the wider order of discourse and social practices. My argument is that, on the one hand, the established radicalization discourse reproduces existing discourses of integration, especially of Islam and Muslims, and dominant discourses of security. On the other hand, the radicalization discourse clearly challenges the order of discourse by blending discourses in new ways, establishing radicalization prevention as naturally linking integration policies with security policies. This is reflected in the proposed initiatives of the action plan, which combines initiatives formerly restricted to the area of integration, such as anti-discrimination initiatives, role model campaigns, citizenship centers, and other actions, with security policies of surveillance, screenings, preventive talks and so on. Established social practices such as the collaboration between social authorities, schools, and police are changed to better reflect the new issue of radicalization, and training manuals for youth club workers, prison guards, and other relevant employees are upgraded. Likewise, established institutional practices and arrangements are changed. For example, in Denmark a new office was established in the Ministry of Foreigners, Immigration and Integration (now the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration) to oversee the implementation of the radicalization prevention plan, and an office for “preventive security” was established in the Danish Security and Intelligence Service.

In conclusion, the radicalization discourse as constituted in the Danish action plan to prevent radicalization from 2009 successfully constructs the problem of radicalization in such a way that a new policy domain is carved out and legitimized, and a range of established social practices and institutional structures altered. However, the analysis also indicates the critical potential of discourse analysis. This is done by showing how the “natural” in this development is in fact a construct, by suggesting that the phenomenon of radicalization could be understood differently, by pointing to counter-hegemonic discourses of radicalization among consumers of the text, and potential counter-productive consequences of the discourse.

DOING FRAME ANALYSIS—AN EXAMPLE

I now give an example of how to apply the frame analysis perspective unfolded above by describing some of the methodological considerations and analytical insights from my research on the protests and mobilization of Danish Muslims in response to the Muhammad cartoons in 2005–06. I was interested in how Danish Muslims framed the Muhammad cartoons in order to mobilize support, either in favor of protesting the cartoons or against such actions, and in how the framing of Danish Muslims resonated in the larger Danish political culture (the following draws upon Lindekilde 2008, 2009, 2013; Lindekilde and Larsson 2009; Lindekilde, Zapata-Barrero, and Mouritsen 2009).

The research was based on a case study—the public debate about the Muhammad cartoons in Denmark—including comparison between Muslim and non-Muslim actors and comparison across time. I investigated the framing by all Muslim and non-Muslim actors who engaged in the public debate about the cartoons. I collected media statements about the cartoons by all actors in one carefully chosen large daily newspaper within a six-month period. Focusing on the Danish Muslim actors, I supplemented the newspaper data with material from relevant Muslim actors' organizational websites, flyers, Friday sermon transcripts, interview transcripts, and so on. The entire material was coded using a combined deductive and inductive coding strategy to identify the core framing elements of different actors. The coding was done in *SPSS*, as the project had an ambition to do quantitative content analysis as well (see Hutter 2014).

The first part of the analysis aimed to identify the core framing elements (diagnosis, prognosis, motivation) of different positions in the debate. This analysis quickly showed great variance, even among the Danish Muslim actors. To some Muslim actors, for example, the primary advocates of large protests and those who tried actively to internationalize the controversy, the publication of Muhammad cartoons was a deliberate provocation and inflicted harm (diagnosis), which should be protested and the responsible made to apologize (prognosis), given the fact that any observant Muslim is obliged to defend the honor of the Prophet Muhammad (motivation). Other Muslim actors stressed how the cartoons were an unpleasant case, which Muslims, however, had to tolerate in the name of free speech (diagnosis), calling upon non-Muslims to treat Muslims and non-Muslims alike and avoid discrimination (prognosis), using arguments of human rights and equal civil rights (motivation). The analysis also traced developments in frame elements across time, pointing, for example, to how the prognostic framing of Danish Muslims seemed to change with the violent escalation of the Muhammad cartoons controversy in the Middle East in early 2006. With these developments, it became increasingly difficult for Muslims in Denmark to argue the need for an apology.

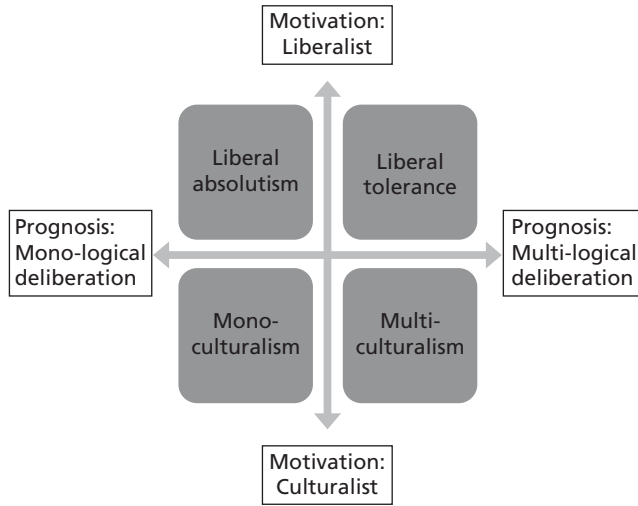


Figure 9.2 The Four Main Frames Used in the Danish Muhammad Caricatures Controversy

In a second step of the analysis I looked at how different framing elements in the public debate tended to be linked, thus constituting the main argumentative positions in the debate. Certain issues, envisioned solutions, and motivating frames tended to mix in standardized ways, forming main “interpretive packages” (Gamson and Modigliani 1995), which compete in lending meaning to the Muhammad cartoons. By cross-tabulating major prognostic and motivational frames in the dataset (determining which ones most often were articulated together) I composed Figure 9.2, which in display format shows the four main frames of the public debate on the Muhammad cartoons in Denmark.

“Liberal tolerance” and “multiculturalism” were the main positions from which critique was raised at the cartoons and the Danish government’s handling of the controversy. The two positions shared the view that the way forward was to foster more pluralist debate, engage in respectful exchange of views, and fertilize more cross-cultural interaction in society, but differed in terms of motivation, distinguishing between liberal toleration of difference, also the kind of cultural difference we do not appreciate, and more demanding arguments of multicultural recognition. Critics, including many Danish Muslim actors, often switched between or bridged the two perspectives.

Supporters of *Jyllands-Posten*’s right to publish the cartoons and of the Danish government’s refusal to take action, and often critics of Muslim demands for an apology, primarily used the “liberal absolutism” and “mono-culturalism” frames. Thus, *Jyllands-Posten*’s project was launched from a “liberal absolutist” position, and backed indirectly by a similar

framing by the Danish government, claiming that freedom of speech is absolute and fundamental to democracy, and a monologue explaining that this is the only response to people who believe otherwise. Interestingly, the analysis showed how the new organization *Democratic Muslims* also made extensive use of such frames. The “mono-cultural” position’s most exemplary exponent in the debate was the *Danish People’s Party*, who supported *Jyllands-Posten* and the Danish government by stressing that freedom of speech is a particularly Danish value, and that anybody who wanted to live in Denmark must adapt to these long-established norms and traditions.

Finally, the analysis looked at frame alignment and resonance building by Danish Muslim actors, investigating to what extent the framing of central Muslim actors resonated within the larger Muslim community and within the discursive opportunity structure of Danish political culture. The analysis showed how the broad mobilization of Danish Muslims in protest against the cartoons was partially based on strategies of frame alignment. For example, when Muslim actors pushing mobilization framed publication of the cartoons as a deliberate provocation, they often connected this to former incidents in Denmark in which Muslims were discriminated against, and to the generally harsh political climate in Denmark vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims. This move could be seen as a form of frame extension. By activating such lived experiences and grievances, Muslim entrepreneurs, especially a group of influential imams, were able to frame the cartoons as part of a general trend that had reached a tipping point and should be stopped. There is no doubt that this frame resonated well among many Danish Muslims at the time. Likewise, in order to mobilize action, the imams in particular used religious rhetoric based in the holy scriptures of Islam to instill a sense of individual obligation to protest the cartoons. Several imams cleverly used forms of frame bridging to connect the issue of the cartoons to the life of the Prophet Muhammad, drawing analogies between the Prophet’s hardship and the current grievances of Muslims in the West. This could clearly motivate many Muslims to be “good Muslims.”

Another analytical point concerns how Muslim framings in the debate resonated within the wider Danish political culture and discursive opportunity structure. Concretely this was done in two ways. First, I compared the frames articulated by Danish Muslims in the public sphere with the frames of non-Muslim actors, particularly the political elite, arguing that similarities in frames could be seen as signs of Muslim adaptation to the dominant political culture and discourses. In fact, the analysis, contrary to many statements about “Muslim particularities” and inability to “play the game,” showed greater similarities than differences. Second, I compared the frames of Muslim actors in communication that was not intended for the public (e.g., internal communiques, newsletters, Friday sermons, and so on) with public media statements by the same actors. Here I found that the framing differed,

especially in terms of motivational framing. Where the call for protest was predominantly motivated in terms of religious doctrines in internal communication, the motivation was more based on references to equal dignity, human rights, and anti-discrimination in the public sphere. Muslim actors apparently altered their framing strategically, depending on the audience. “Translating” grievances from religious rhetoric to secular rights-based reasoning when entering the public sphere makes sense if we consider the role of religion in public debates in Denmark. By using a secular rhetoric, stressing fundamental rights of freedom of religion and anti-discrimination, Danish Muslims no doubt tapped into central values and norms of Danish political culture (as indicated by secondary sources). Put differently, Danish Muslims to a large degree adapted their framing according to available discursive opportunities in the public sphere. Rather than interpreting this variance in Muslim framing among different arenas as a sign that Danish Muslims speak with “two tongues,” which has often been claimed, I concluded that Danish Muslims were in fact well integrated in the Danish political culture and were able to use frames that resonated in the larger society.

In conclusion, the frame analysis of Danish Muslims during the Muhammad cartoons controversy described here shows the ability of the framing approach to show how a particular event is given meaning through particular frames that package certain events, former experiences, pieces of ideology, norms, and so on, and offer distinct interpretations of the unfolding situation. The analysis shows how Muslim actors used framing strategies strategically to mobilize support internally, and de-mobilize opponents externally. However, the analysis also shows that actors’ framing activities are bounded by the discursive opportunities of the context or domain in which they are active.

Conclusion: When to Use Discourse or Frame Analysis and When to Combine?

Throughout the chapter I have stressed the similarities between discourse and frame analysis within the field of social movement studies when it comes to fundamental epistemological and ontological assumptions, theoretical implications, challenges of case selection and data collection, and in terms of coding strategies and presentation of results. I have argued that it makes sense to view frame analysis in the variety discussed here as a particular causal-oriented and focused version of discourse analysis. This is not to say that the two approaches should be collapsed, but to stress their affinities, which are often neglected. The main differences between the two approaches as presented here are summed up schematically in Table 9.2.

Table 9.2 Main Differences Between Discourse and Frame Analysis

	Discourse analysis (Fairclough inspired)	Frame analysis (Snow and Benford inspired)
<i>Analytical scope</i>	Wide	Narrow
<i>Causal orientation</i>	Implicit	Explicit
<i>Assumed strategic rationality</i>	Low	High
<i>Levels of analysis</i>	Linguistic, micro-sociological, macro-sociological	Micro- and macro-sociological
<i>Case selection</i>	Small-n	Medium-to-large-n
<i>Data sampling</i>	Theoretical/strategic sampling	Theoretical/strategic and representative sampling
<i>Coding strategy</i>	Mostly inductive	Mostly deductive

As indicated, the choice between discourse and frame analysis, or any other approach, should rest on the research question. If we are interested in how a particular social phenomenon has come into existence and is filled with meaning, discourse analysis would be a good choice. If we are interested in explaining similarities and differences in mobilization among various actors on a given issue, framing analysis may provide some of the answer. Likewise, if we are interested in social movement actors as strategic agents, frame analysis has a lot to offer, but if we are interested in social movement agents as co-producers of social reproduction or change, discourse analysis may be the way to go.

In studies of the communicative and meaning making side of social movement activities, discourse and frame analysis may very well be combined (for examples, see Lindekilde 2009). The in-depth discourse analysis of single exemplary texts may serve as the starting point of a larger frame analysis designed to increase the explanatory power and external validity of the study. For example, building on the detailed study of the Danish action plan to prevent radicalization described earlier, it would be interesting to investigate more systematically how this dominant discourse is challenged by counter-frames across various types of actors in the field. It might also be that a relatively large-n study of framing has identified interesting new framing mechanisms or framing “outliers,” which one now wants to investigate more in depth by applying elements of discourse analysis. For example, after having identified the tendency of some Danish Muslims to frame bridge between the issue of the cartoons and religious narratives, I applied elements of discourse analysis (metaphor analysis, inter-discursivity, inter-textuality) to get a better grasp of how this frame bridge was established. In short, the possibilities of combination and mutual enrichment between discourse and frame analysis in the study of social movements are many. This chapter has provided the framework on which such analytical division of labor can be explored.

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10 In-Depth Interviews

Donatella della Porta

We can define the in-depth interview as a technique or procedure used to collect data. By allowing us to gather the reflections of the interviewee, interviews constitute a fundamental tool for generating empirical knowledge through asking people to talk about certain themes (della Porta 2010). Interviews are, and continue to constitute, a fundamental research method in the social sciences. In both qualitative and quantitative methods, interviews are the most widely used technique for gathering information of different types. Indeed, it has often been observed that we live in a world of interviews—which means that partners can be expected to have previous experience of this type of situation.

Interviews are a particular type of conversation: one structured and guided by the researcher with a view to stimulating the provision of certain information. Here, “the style of qualitative interview might appear conversational, but what happens in the interview is very different from what happens in an ordinary conversation. In an ordinary conversation each participant voices observations, thoughts, and feelings. Either participant can set a new topic, either can ask questions. In the qualitative interview the respondent provides information while the interviewer, as a representative of the study, is responsible for directing the respondent to the topic that matters to the study” (Weiss 1994, 8). The interviewer is in fact responsible for judging when a response is sufficient, or when specification is required, while not normally offering his or her opinion—even if occasionally signaling interest and respect, including through the use of colloquial expressions (“yes,” “OK,” and so on). Yet, both parties are “necessarily and ineluctably active:” “meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, not simply transported through the respondent’s replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter” (Holstein and Gubrium 2002, 115).

In social movement studies, the relative scarcity of systematic collections of documents or reliable databases gives in-depth interviews even more importance. As Kathleen Blee (2013, 603) observes, “personal interviews with activists are a common strategy for gathering data on current social movements.” While life histories (see della Porta 2014) allow us to reconstruct the micro-dynamics of political participation, key informant interviews are often used in order to gain information on specific aspects of a movement: from mobilization strategies to internal dynamics. Normally, in-depth interviews are

to be preferred, especially where the researcher is aiming to make a detailed description: attention is paid to the process and interest taken in the interpretations interviewees give of the process itself. Not only do in-depth interviews provide information about (and from) rank-and-file activists, on which few other sources are available, but they are of fundamental importance for the study of motives, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as the identities and emotions of movement activists (Blee 2013, 95), since they “bring human agency to the center of movement analysis” (Blee 2013, 96). This instrument is all the more necessary for small and secretive organizations (Blee and Taylor 2002, 93), where other sources of information are limited and biased. In general, interviews are best suited “for establishing the importance of agency or ideational factors, such as culture, norms, ethics, perceptions, learning, and cognition” (Rathbun 2008, 691).

In what follows, I address methodological issues in the different steps of a research design based on qualitative interviews, drawing illustrations from one of the most challenging research projects I have conducted—one on the policing of protest in Italy, for which a collaborator and I interviewed about 30 police officers in two Italian cities, Florence and Milan (della Porta 1998; della Porta and Reiter 1998; della Porta and Reiter 2004).

Concepts and Theories

Qualitative methods are most useful and powerful when they are used to discover how the respondent sees the world. This objective of the method makes it essential that testimony be elicited in as unobtrusive, non directive manner as possible. (McCracken 1988, 21)

Like quantitative research, qualitative work requires a research design made up of different stages (albeit less rigidly separated than those used in quantitative research). A first theme to be confronted when analyzing the different stages of a research design including qualitative interviews is the use of *theory*. Clarifying theoretical questions is a fundamental step for the subsequent development of important research tools, including the interview guide. The choice of the method tends in fact to adapt to the theoretical questions, thus contributing in turn to their definition.

Even though no absolute correspondence exists between research technique, epistemological methodology, and theory (della Porta and Keating 2008, chap. 1), it is normally observed that those scholars who privilege qualitative interviews have some theoretical propensities. From the perspective of theories linked to it, qualitative research has been presented as oriented to:

- seeing through the eyes of . . . , or taking the subject's perspective;
- describing the mundane detail of everyday settings;
- understanding actions and meanings in their social contexts;
- emphasizing time and processes. (Silverman 1993, 24)

Although the qualitative interview has been used to address a wide variety of themes, it is considered particularly well adapted for approaching areas linked to a few particular theories (defined at different levels of abstraction): among these, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism are those most often mentioned.

The qualitative interview is peculiarly well suited to the analysis of highly relevant aspects of *phenomenological* reflection: the sense actors have of their environment. As Shultz observes, "The world of nature as explored by natural scientists does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their every-day life" (Schutz 1962, 51). In this approach, the main task is "to capture this process of interpretation" (Bogdan and Taylor 1975, 13). The qualitative interview is thus particularly useful when we wish to analyze the meaning individuals attribute to the external world and to their own participation in it, the construction of identity, and the development of emotions.

Qualitative interviews are in fact particularly useful for understanding the sense that actors give their actions. The use of qualitative interviews is privileged by those who side with *interpretative epistemologies* according to which "what distinguishes human (social) action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful. Thus, to understand a particular social action (e.g., friendship, voting, marrying, teaching . . .), the inquirer must grasp the meaning that constitutes that action. To say that human action is meaningful is to claim either that it has a certain intentional content that indicates the kind of action it is and/or that what an action means can be grasped only in terms of the system of meanings to which it belongs" (Schwandt 2003, 296). Understanding (as *Verstehen*) thus requires the interpretation of the meaning of our own and others' actions, and this process of interpretation is constitutive of the action itself, as understanding is "participative, conversational and dialogic" (Schwandt 2003, 302).

The qualitative interview has also been considered particularly apt for a *naturalist* vision, oriented towards "rich descriptions of people and interaction as they exist and unfold in their native habitats" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997, 6). The aim is to discover the underlying order of "their world," their

everyday life. The belief that understanding requires getting near stems from the Chicago school.

Beyond these general propensities, the choice of theory can, however, follow various paths. Particularly relevant is the distinction between:

- a) deductive strategies: here, the theory, which may be built on the basis of previous empirical results, provides a very clear focus for the research; and
- b) inductive strategies: here models are used at a low level of abstraction given that in inductive research concepts are operationalized and a relation among them sought subsequently (see also Mattoni 2014, on grounded theory).

Qualitative interviews have been observed to be characterized by “Favouring open and relatively unstructured research designs; avoiding concepts and theories at an early stage” (Silverman 1993, 24). The separation between deductive and inductive is nevertheless too neat, given that knowledge proceeds through frequent interaction between theory and research, reflection and fieldwork. In reality, an *abductive* strategy is most often pursued: regularity observed at the outset stimulates new questions, and the research attempts to answer these through controlled observations. As Silverman (2006) observes in suggesting we avoid “under-theorizing” a problem, it is necessary to know what to look for in an interview, even of the least structured kind. From this point of view, a research project should not be justified only by the social relevance of the problem investigated, but also by theoretical relevance. The warning is “Never to conduct a research interview until you have sorted out research topic and analytical framework” (Silverman 2006, 137).

In social movement studies, the use of qualitative interviews has been particularly important in research that aims at investigating the micro-dynamics of commitment. In fact, “through semi-structured interviewing, researchers can gain insight into the individual and collective visions, imaginings, hopes, expectations, critique of the present, and projection of the future on which the possibility of collective action rests and through which social movements form, endure or disband” (Blee and Taylor 2002, 95). In-depth interviews have been the basis of studies oriented to capture the path of recruitment in social movement organizations, such as Doug McAdam’s (1988) path-breaking work on recruitment in the Freedom Summer campaign in the United States, as well as the work by James Downton and Paul Wehr (1997) on persistent activists, looking at the biographical effects of participation in social movements.

From this point of view, it has been said that interviews allow us to detect human agency, opening a window onto daily life; they “generate representations that embody the subject’s voice, minimizing, at least as much as possible, the voice of the researcher” (Blee and Taylor 2002, 96). In Elisabeth Wood’s work, as many as 200 in-depth interviews with freedom fighters in

the civil war in El Salvador permitted a very fine-grained analysis of the puzzle of insurgent collective action, showing how “the values, norms, practices, beliefs, and collective identities of insurgents” were not fixed, but rather “evolved in response to the experiences of the conflict itself, previous rebellious actions, repression, and the ongoing interpretation of events by the participants themselves” (2003, 19). In Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson’s (2013, 15) research on the Tea Party, the activists’ own stories were used to “make sense of grassroots activism.” In fact, they observe, when visiting participants in Virginia or Arizona, they (“welcoming”) allowed the two scholars to “let us to know them individually” (Skocpol and Williamson 2013).

In research on the struggles against the construction of a high-speed train line in the Italian Alps and of a bridge over the strait between Sicily and Calabria, in-depth interviews were presented as a way to “give voice” to the activists: a methodological choice which reflected “a theoretical attention given to the subjective construction of meaning mentioned previously. The link between macro-processes of a social or political nature and their aggregative effects in terms of protest passes through a social construction of reality on behalf of those that mobilise” (della Porta and Piazza 2008).

However, in-depth-interviews can also be oriented to capture, at the meso-level, the ways in which movements mobilize. For instance, in Kathleen Blee’s (2012) research on *Democracy in the Making*, in-depth interviews with activists were combined with participant observation in order to understand the emotional and cognitive dimensions in the creation of grass-roots protest groups. As she observed, “observations alone do not provide sufficient data because people generally don’t talk about what they take for granted. To correct this, lengthy, semi-structured interviews probed activists’ experiences and interpretations” (Blee 2012, 12). From a theoretical point of view, the open and flexible nature of the qualitative interview allows the generation of new hypotheses and the clarification of others. In a similar vein, Alice Mattoni (2012) used interviews to understand the media practices of precarious workers.

In my own research on the policing of protest, the use of qualitative interviews reflected attention to the ways in which police officers made sense of the complex environment with which they interacted. Bridging social movement studies and police studies in order to address a (then little-known) aspect of contentious politics, I started from the assumptions that a) the policing of protest is extremely important for social movements, as interactions in the street represent a relevant part of their interactions with the state; and b) even though police action is strongly influenced by the government, police officers—at various hierarchical levels—retain a certain degree of discretion. The control of public order is in fact one of the most delicate functions taken on by the police. Indeed, for people involved in demonstrations, the police represent the very face of state power (Lipsky 1965). Moreover, direct

interventions by the police to restore public order put the police on the front pages of newspapers and increase the likelihood of public criticism (della Porta 1999). Because of this delicacy, the strategies of the police concerning the question of public order are multiple and ever-changing—so much so that important changes in the police organization often follow periods of political turmoil. Much research on the police has indeed noted the degrees of freedom that police officers—as street level bureaucrats or specialists—have in implementing laws and regulations. Research on the police has stressed that the organizational imperative is to keep situations under control, rather than enforce the law (della Porta and Reiter 1998). Police officers indeed enjoy a high degree of discretion in their encounters with citizens.

As research on these topics was then in its infancy, I was obliged to combine an inductive approach with some deductively driven hypotheses about the differential policing of political and social groups. From police studies, I draw some ideas about different policing styles as well as the impact of some characteristics of police organizational structures and cultures on these. Beyond the contextual ones, the characteristics of police forces—their organizational resources and professional culture—are also considered as important explanations of different protest policing styles. Degree of militarization, legal competences, and degree of professionalization all were expected to play a role in the definition of police styles. From social movement studies, I then derived some concepts such as civil rights and law and order coalitions, as well as some reflections on how stable and contingent opportunities could affect policing styles. In particular, previous research had indicated a weakening in the repressive capacity of the state as a precondition for cycles of protest. The study of social movements suggests that state reactions to challengers are influenced by specific characteristics of the political opportunity structure: in particular, the existing dominant culture and institutions. The political “complexion” of a government is (or at least has been) another decisive variable in explaining strategic choices concerning public order.

Another element intervenes, however, between the “reality” of the situation and police action: the perception that the police have of disturbances, of the techniques at their disposal, and of the requests that come from outside their ranks. These perceptions make up part of what I called police knowledge, a term which refers to the images held by the police about their role and the external challenges they are asked to face. As suggested in *Policing Protest* (della Porta and Reiter 1998), the research (and therefore reliance on qualitative interviews) was based on the assumption that the impact of contextual variables on protest policing styles is filtered through the police force’s perception of its role and the surrounding society. First, police have been said to not only be sensitive to their environment and to the characteristics of the perceived threat, but also to the expected demands from authorities and public opinion. However, they must also maintain (to different extents) the

support of authorities and the public. I therefore assumed that, as in other spheres of social life, the activity of the police to control public order is influenced, first, by the professional culture of the police—that is by the images police officers hold about their own role—and, second, by the environmental culture of the police—that is the totality of assumptions they hold about external reality. In-depth interviews were extremely useful to analyze police knowledge.

What to Ask?

The qualitative interview is principally differentiated from the quantitative one by virtue of the tool used for its administration: the questionnaire in quantitative research, the grid in qualitative. In reality, many interview strategies combine different choices that are in any case not always dichotomous (see Table 10.1). The degree to which a questionnaire is closed or open, the standardization of the question order, and of interventions by the interviewer will tend to vary along a continuum. Sometimes different moments are planned in the same interview within which different strategies are applied: open and closed questions, directive and non-directive, standardized and non-standardized can be—and often are—used contemporaneously in the same interview.

The choice of the point at which to locate the interview is influenced by different elements, namely:

- epistemological preferences, with greater structuration in more neo-positivist approaches and greater flexibility in interpretivist approaches;
- state of the art in the field of research, often within cycles of accumulation of knowledge, with the use of less structured techniques mostly to generate hypotheses, and more structured techniques to test them;
- number of interviews planned, with a trade-off between the quantity of interviewees and the depth of the interview, but also and above all the need to code them for comparison;

Table 10.1 Some Choices in Qualitative Interviews

Closed	Open
Directive	Nondirective
Structured	Unstructured
Standardized	Flexible

- number of cases, with a greater need for structuration linked to a greater number of cases.
- number of interviewers, with the need for structuration increasing with the dimensions of the research group.

In qualitative interviews, typically face-to-face, the guide is flexible. It comprises “a listing of areas to be covered in the interview along with, for each area, a list of topics or questions that together might suggest lines of inquiring” (Weiss 1994, 48). Although more flexible and not relegated to the initial stages of research, the preparation of the guide for a qualitative interview requires a review of relevant studies and knowledge of the field. In quantitative research, this information is necessary in order to draft the questionnaire, proceeding from theoretical questions to their operationalization, to then be tested through pilot interviews. With very few exceptions, a grid is also used in qualitative interviews to check that all arguments have been discussed without distracting the interviewer, even though the simultaneous aim is to leave space to explore unforeseen meanings and phenomena through unstructured questions and answers (see Table 10.2).

It has been suggested that an *interview grid* must contain the following (McCracken 1988):

- Basic information.* Some socio-biographical data (age, sex, profession . . .) are considered particularly important elements for situating the interviewee in a wider context in order to better understand their responses. In fact, “Collecting these details in this way helps both to cue the interviewer to the biographical realities that will inform the respondent’s subsequent testimony and to make sure that all this material is readily at hand during the analysis” (McCracken 1988, 34).
- Substantive questions.* While recognizing the importance of allowing interviewees to tell the story in their own terms, qualitative interview grids often include *grand tour questions*; that is, very general questions phrased in a non-directive manner.

Table 10.2 Content of the Interview Scheme

Structure	Phrasing	Order	Length
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select topic • Standard or tailored • Ask for comments, examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple • Normal language • Neutral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with what is interesting • Difficult questions in the middle • Boring questions at the end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A couple of hours • Cut unnecessary questions • Collect available information before interviews

- c) *Prompts* are also often inserted, including:
- a) floating prompts, which exploit the characteristics of everyday language: from raising an eyebrow when repeating a relevant word used by the interviewee to asking directly what something means;
 - b) contrast prompts: relative to contrasts among concepts (“what difference is there between this and . . .”). To clarify anomalies the interviewee can be asked to expand on specific points, for example by saying, ‘some people think differently. . .’;
 - c) category prompts: asking the interviewee to place some main actions, period, objects, etc. into broad categories;
 - d) recalling events in which the research topic was implicated;
 - e) explaining facts and processes: “playing dumb” often solicits generous interpretations from the interviewee;
 - f) asking the interviewee to prepare something (video, story).

In the elaboration of the interview grid it is useful to proceed in three steps. First, the relevant themes the researcher wants to orient the conversation towards should be listed. These themes are normally then ordered according to importance. The themes are then transformed into questions. It has been noted that “each question is particular: there are good ones, less good and bad ones, central and peripheral” (Kaufmann 2009, 49). A third step is thus necessary, that of improving the phrasing of the questions, working in particular on those that are “badly constructed, too banal, too pompous, too convoluted, that produce indifference, silence, unease” (Kaufmann 2009, 49).

As far as the *formulation of the questions* is concerned, it has been underlined that “There are no magic questions. Any question is a good question if it directs the respondent to material needed by the study in a way that makes it easy for the respondent to provide the material. Sometimes the best question is one that, in a very few words directs the respondent to give more detail or fill a gap” (Weiss 1994, 74). Nevertheless, some attention should be paid to:

- asking questions in everyday language;
- avoiding questions with double negatives;
- avoiding asking two questions at the same time;
- preparing difficult questions: “If there are delicate questions that will be asked . . . have versions of these ready beforehand and be prepared to ask them without hesitation or embarrassment” (Miller 2000, 90–1).

An important decision when planning a grid regards *the order of the questions*. Waiting to establish a good rapport with the interviewee before asking difficult or delicate questions is normally advised. Above all, the interview must begin with a clear explanation of the subject of the interview, the themes to be approached, etc. Thus, “The interview itself will open with a carefully conceived section in which the respondent’s anxieties are put to rest” (McCracken

1988, 41). To stimulate the interviewee to develop his or her answers, time-extension strategies can be employed (e.g., asking for an account of how a certain process began), along with deepening strategies (with stimuli such as, "Let me understand this better"), and strategies for identifying specific actors (who was there) (Weiss 1994, 75–6). A generic question can then be used, oriented to breaking the ice, but it is important to concentrate attention on the central research theme as soon as possible. Demographic information is usually left until the end, given that the closed format discourages conversation. At the end of the interview, suspending rather than ending the conversation is advised, given that it may be useful to contact the interviewee again about some points.

A final important decision for the preparation of the guide regards the *length* of the interview. This may vary; nevertheless, it is necessary to take into account those natural oscillations in attention that make an interview that lasts longer than a couple of hours tiring. To reduce the length of the interview and concentrate attention on the unique contribution of the interviewee, it is advisable to prepare interviews by gathering as much information as possible in written documents (a task greatly aided by new information technologies). When preparing an interview, it is in fact necessary to consider that a relaxed amount of time facilitates conversation. Indeed, in-depth interviews are extraordinarily draining, even for the interviewer, if it is true that "genius in creative interviewing requires 99 percent perspiration" (Douglas 1985, 27).

In addition, it is always useful to be ready to *record* the interview in order to make a verbatim transcription of all or part of the conversation. While recording does not usually create psychological inhibitions, especially after the first few moments, it is nevertheless useful to plan a moment at the end of the interview where the interviewee feels free to make comments "off-the-record." These parts of interviews, which are not to be used without the explicit consent of the interviewee, nevertheless allow for a better understanding of other parts of the interview. As far as the use of recorders is concerned, technical details should not be underestimated. It is necessary to check that the recorder is working, that power points or extra batteries are available, and to be careful about where the microphone is placed.

Finally, as with quantitative interviews, it is worth *testing* the interview grid before beginning the interview campaign. Normally, after drafting and putting questions in a logical order, the grid is tested with pilot interviews that serve to note any difficulties in the formulation of the questions, but also to approach an optimal length by modifying the grid and proceeding, if the changes are extensive, with another pilot interview. Depending on the issue approached, the interview grid may be tested through a "mock" interview conducted with any partner, or pilot interviews with people who will in any case be interview partners but are, for whatever reason, more available. In addition, it can be useful to check the meaning given to certain words used

in the grid in the environment to be investigated. In these cases, the request made of a partner external to the research is not to respond to the questions, but rather to explain them.

While qualitative interviews can be useful within various epistemological approaches, the choice of the content of interviews nevertheless depends on the approach adopted. In particular, neo-positivist scholars consider interviews as sources of knowledge on real events, constructivists as mutually constructed (Silverman 2006, 119). For both approaches there are tensions between the subjective point of view of an actor and the perception of a complex structure.

Besides approaches, there is, however, some practical agreement on the fact that the interview outline must list the important questions for the researcher, considering the potential length of the interview. Even if challenging questions are better asked after trust is built, it is important that the essentials questions are asked before the interviewee loses interest, or time is out (Rathbun 2008, 699). Also, in in-depth interviews, questions can be tailored to the specific characteristics of the respondent, and successive interviews can take into account the results of the previous ones, adding some specific questions if new hypotheses emerge (Rathbun 2008, 699).

In research conducted in the 1990s on the tactics and conceptions of controlling protest within the Italian police force, I took an intermediate epistemological position, as I aimed to both reconstruct existing models of protest policing and to capture the construction of the external reality by the police officers. The initial question in the questionnaire we elaborated was oriented to introducing—in a slow but still concrete manner—the research theme, by focusing on the interviewee's experience of transformation in public-order strategies (della Porta and Reiter 1998, 2004):

The research is about public order, and in particular controlling mass demonstrations. We would be interested to know both how the challenges in the field of public order have changed and if there have been changes in control strategies. A first question: in general, do you think there have been important transformations in terms of the problems met with in public order since the 1970s?

The interviews then proceeded with questions oriented to collect concrete examples of public-order control situations experienced by the interviewees, above all those considered as paradigmatic illustrations of the transformations underway in public-order control and perceptions of this. The reflections of the interviewees were from time to time refocused on the theme by using prompts such as, "But then, in the 1990s, where did the dangers to public order come from?" During the narration of concrete examples more detailed information on the specific case was asked for (e.g., "Did you negotiate with the organizers before the demonstration then?"; "Is it true that yesterday the military and state police were deployed in parallel?"), and the conversation

then brought back to more general practices (e.g., “Do these kinds of negotiations happen often?”; “Is that the case for football too?”; “How are tasks usually divided between the military and state police?”).

Comparative terms referring to similar events or procedures in other periods (“. . . in the 1970s”) or places (“like in Milan”) were introduced to stimulate further elaboration. Some of the specified themes were addressed by making references to practices seen in other countries, asking the interviewee to comment on the Italian case on the basis of their experience: “In other European countries, in England for example, they talk about direct links between racist environments, violent fan clubs and right-wing environments. Is this the case in Italy?”; or, “In other countries they have experimented with mediator figures with psychology skills when dealing with public-order problems, both political and non-political . . .”). Comparisons can also be stimulated by referring to different groups policed: “For public order interventions of the political kind the type of actors involved are often reflected on, thinking also about the potential reactions in public opinion should force be employed. Are the same reflections made for interventions at matches?” Requests for further detail could follow: for example, “I would be really interested if you could elaborate on this theme, given that we have only been able to get information from textbooks about this . . .” Or, “In your experience, in these cases, if there are violent groups, how can you intervene?” Requests for precise information were also planned: for example, “It seems to me that you are suggesting this distinction: nowadays public-order problems are less political and organized. Is that so?”

Other questions were oriented to capture the officers’ construction of their own role, those they considered as challenges, and not only their understanding of the government’s request, but also of the expectations of the citizens. Particularly delicate themes were often broached by requesting a comment on a written text. In the course of our interviews, the conception of public order of the interviewee was, for example, analyzed using his/her response to the following question:

In “Notes on public order services” published by the Directorate General for Public Security—Police Schools Division in 1969 we read the following: “Public order presupposes observance of the ‘legal order,’ but the latter is a static order that indicates perfect coincidence of fact and right; in an ideal situation of equilibrium between entities and social forces, public order expresses reality in its dynamic aspect. Above all, the important consequence that in matters of public order factual considerations should always take priority in the evaluation of situations and in subsequent decisions derives from this premise. Therefore no provision can or should be adopted if the social forces in movement have not been previously evaluated, and if there is inadequate knowledge of the motive of the disturbance, the mental states of the demonstrators, the locations of the intervention, the congruity of the forces to be used to restore the disturbed balance, the most suitable means, timing choices. . . .”

Could you explain to me what these instructions mean? Could you tell me how they are translated concretely?

When writing the guide, particular attention was paid to the choice of the clearest and most neutral words (e.g., we did not talk about “repression” but about “control”). A pilot interview with a police trade unionist allowed us to further hone some questions. While we opened with a “grand tour” question that we thought particularly interesting for the interviewee, biographical questions were left until the end. Whereas the lengths of the interviews obviously varied with the (rather variable) loquacity of the interviewees, most lasted around the planned time of two hours. While all the interviews were, with the permission of the interviewees, recorded, a phase with the recorder switched off at the end of each interview for off-the-record statements was very useful.

Whom to Interview?

Quantitative research involves paying a great deal of attention to sampling, usually oriented to choosing a sample that is representative of the universe in question: a series of rules are used to extract random samples to which to apply tests of statistical significance. Principles of random selection are in contrast used very rarely in the choice of interviewees in qualitative research projects where the low number of cases usually prevents any reliance on statistical rules, and the small size of the sample increases the risk of excluding theoretically relevant categories from the analysis. The choice of the cases to analyze is thus also extremely important for qualitative interviews, even if different criteria are applied. Indeed, “Sampling is a major problem for any type of research. . . . We need the sample to persuade people that we know something about the whole thing” (Becker 1998, 67).

The choice of interviewees in qualitative research is oriented towards two distinct categories: informers and participants. The category of informers is composed of “people who are uniquely able to be informative because they are expert in an area or were privileged witnesses of an event; and people who, taken together, display what happens within a population affected by a situation or event” (Weiss 1994, 17). The objective here is thick description. In choosing informers, qualities such as sufficient presentation, capacity, and interest in research are added to normal criteria concerning the relevance of experience to the research focus, with these becoming ever more important where the research addresses few cases (as in life histories).

The other category is composed of people belonging to the population to be analyzed, selected following different criteria. Sampling in qualitative

research does not follow the representativity criteria of quantitative research, but rather criticality with respect to the theoretical model, as well as feasibility with respect to access to the subjects involved. In sampling variously defined as selective, purposive, or theoretical, the criterion is that of *happenstance*, that is relevance with respect to the research project. As an alternative to the strategy of representativity of the sample with respect to the whole population, a research focus on specific categories has been proposed. The aim is to typify conceptually developed types, or to seek out groups where the processes being studied are more likely to occur. Participants are thus chosen on a conceptual basis: “The goal of the sampling is to secure a spread of individuals that represent all of the types or groups that are significant for the phenomenon or topic under construction” (Miller 2000, 77). This type of sampling is iterative: it involves moving backwards and forwards between sampling and theoretical reflection. In some cases, the choice may be to fall back on extreme cases, as “The trick is to identify the case that is likely to upset your theory and look for it” (Becker 1998, 87).

Concerning the order in which to contact interviewees, it can be useful to start with the most accessible, or at least not the most central to the research. In fact, it is suggested “to start with people who are available to you and easy to interview, especially if having interviewed them will make you more informed and legitimized when you proceed to interview others. A second principle is to have your early interviews with people who are of marginal importance to the study, so that if you make mistakes it won’t matter so much” (Weiss 1994, 20–1). Interviews with experts can help in gaining a better perspective on the fields, and on potential interview partners.

The *number* of interviews can vary—in relation to available resources, but also to how deep each interview will be (see Table 10.3). Evidently the higher the number of interviews, the greater the potential for understanding a phenomenon in all its complexity; it should, nevertheless, be borne in mind that the in-depth analysis of interviews is generally very onerous in terms of time.

While no magic number exists, the criterion most often adopted is that of the saturation of knowledge. According to this approach, “You stop when you encounter diminishing returns, when the information you obtain is redundant or peripheral, when what you learn that is new adds too little to what you already know to justify the time and cost of interviewing” (Weiss 1994, 21).

Table 10.3 Choosing People (Informants and Participants)

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- How many? → saturation of knowledge
 - How to find them? → lists, snowball, . . .
 - How to recruit them? → letter, phone, personal contacts . . .
 - Whom? → availability, theoretical relevance . . .
-

Therefore, the interview campaign ends when new informers no longer add any new knowledge with respect to the body of data already collected (Bertaux 1981). However, given the mentioned investment of time and energy needed for conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews, most projects based on this technique tend to use no more than about 50.

Given that qualitative interviews tend to be invasive with respect to private life, it is particularly important from the ethical point of view to reach a clear agreement with the interviewee in order to guarantee anonymity and control over the final result (which may vary from no control to the possibility of reading the entire interview or quoted sections to check their accuracy and also comment on the analysis made by the researcher).

In the research on the policing of protest in Italy, the choice of interviewees was based on the central assumption that police knowledge and style varied among the different organizational bodies that intervene in public-order policing. In Italy, as elsewhere, an intervention to re-establish public order involves various institutional actors. At a local level, the political duty to maintain public order falls to the *Prefetto* (who represents the central government at the local level), whereas technically the *Questore* (the head of police) is responsible. When potential disturbances to public order arise—when, in particular, a large crowd or a political initiative is foreseen—the *Questore* orders the police to become involved, delegating an official to command the forces in their actions. The principal police corps that may intervene is the *Digos* (Branch for general investigations and special operations, a political policing unit), and the *Reparto Mobile* (forces for rapid reaction). The plain-clothes *Digos* officers are responsible for information gathering; the uniformed *Reparto Mobile* officers are available for forcible intervention. Whilst the *Digos* forms part of the *Questura*, the *Reparto Mobile* is under the direct command of the national head of police: the *Questore* must therefore ask the head of police to assign a certain number of men or women in uniform, who may be taken from various units in the city under the *Questura*'s control, or from other units. In the sphere of public order, the *Questore* also commands the *Carabinieri*, who are expected to cover half of the policing duties in the case of large-scale police interventions. In exceptional circumstances, the army may also be mobilized. In certain situations, the *Squadra Mobile* (Mobile Squad) may also intervene. This squad is composed mainly of agents in civilian dress who are responsible for judicial policing; the *Volanti* (Flying Squad), a uniformed patrol; and the *Polizia Scientifica* (Scientific Police), plain-clothes agents and officials who are responsible for gathering evidence of possible crimes. In our attempt to cover the main relevant profiles, in Florence we interviewed seven officials from the *Questura* (police headquarters) and, in Milan, five officials from the *Questura* and ten from the *Reparto Mobile* (police action force), in addition to the head of the center of study and research on the police, run by SIULP (the largest police trade union).

First contacts were quite difficult, in part because of the formal regulations that require that a police officer applies for permission from hierarchical superiors before giving interviews to outsiders, in part because of the secretive culture which is still very strong among the Italian police. Obtaining permission from a distant and hostile bureaucracy required the mobilization of several official and unofficial channels of access and accreditation. As the research was based at the European University Institute, and part of a broader cross-national comparison, we relied on the scientific and institutional credentials of this EU-related body, as well as the reputation of the scientists involved. Sociologist colleagues at the electoral offices of the Ministry of the Interior introduced us to the relevant functionaries, and served as guarantors of the academic interests of the research.

The work required to gain access to the local police, the *Questure* of Florence and Milan, was similarly complex and multifaceted, formal and informal. This required official invitations to visit the EUI premises, and the presentation of the main questions we wanted to address to some police functionaries. Once formal permissions were obtained, it was then less complicated to secure the agreement of the individual police officers we wanted to interview, even though we still had to go through the hierarchy to get lists of potential candidates. To broaden the list, we also approached representatives of one of the major police unions. We then used snowballing to complete our list.

Conducting the Interview

A certain equilibrium between reserve and participation has been called for when conducting in-depth interviews. The open nature of the questionnaire accentuates the role of the interview as produced in an interactive way: the interviewees are active participants—even if the balance of intervention by the researcher should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis in relation to epistemological preferences, the object of research, and the character of the interviewee: timid or assertive, formal or informal, direct or abstract . . . (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, 86). It has been observed that,

In qualitative research the notion of some kind of impersonal, machine like investigator is recognized as a chimera. An interview is a complicated, shifting social process occurring to individual human beings, which can never be exactly replicated. There cannot be definitive rules about the use of open-ended questions, leading and loaded questions, disagreements with respondents and so on. Such choices must depend on the understanding researchers have of the person they are with and the kind of relationship they have developed in the encounter. . . . What is crucial is that researchers choose their actions with a self-conscious awareness of why they are making them. (Jones 1985, 48–9)

The conception of “ideal” interactions between interviewee and interviewer varies, however, according to different epistemological perspectives.

In a positivist approach, the interview must succeed in extracting information that is held by the interview partner. As has been noted:

From many conventional social science perspectives, the relevant researcher expertise is in the getting of the data, and criteria of success at interviewing include such matters as whether there was a good “rapport,” whether the respondent talked a lot, and what they talked about, whether and how they divulged what the interviewer was after. All such criteria of success rely on the assumption that there is preexisting information of some sort (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, perspectives) to extract from some respondent. The interviewer attempts to position herself or himself as colleague, friend, or confessor in order that the respondent speaks openly, authentically or truthfully, to produce valid reporting on some interior or exterior state of affairs. (Baker 1997, 130)

The search for uncontaminated information is the objective, even if often unobtainable. “The secret is in the formulation of the questions and in creating an atmosphere favorable to open and undistorted communication between the interviewer and interviewee” (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, 115).

In a constructivist perspective, however, the interview is considered an essentially interactive product. In synthesis, “(1) interviewing is understood as an interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge about how members of a category routinely speak; (2) questions are a central part of the data and cannot be seen as neutral invitations to speak . . . (3) interview responses are treated as accounts rather than reports—that is, they are understood as the work of accounting by a member of a category for activities attached to that category” (Baker 1997, 131). In this case, the researcher does not seek to “gather” data, but to produce it: the interview is treated as a space in which cultural knowledge is deployed.

In any case, the fact that the interview is open and relatively unstructured entails attributing the interviewee ample space to intervene based on “active listening.” The interviewer must allow “the interviewee the freedom to talk and ascribe meanings” (Noaks and Wincup 2004, 80). In addition, it is usually advisable to avoid anticipating answers or interrupting the flow of the narration. In general, “The interviewer must not succumb to the temptation to hijack the interview as a platform for their own ideas. You should not argue with the respondent, attempt to convert them to your own opinions or monopolize the interview with your own life story or assertion” (Miller 2000, 89).

The assumption is that interviewees have cultural and analytical resources that they employ when responding to a question. They activate moral judgments and adjust to a certain category of identification proposed by the person interviewing them (thus it is different to speak as a mother than as an activist). If the interviewee is active, this does not mean that the interviewer is passive:

Rather they converse with respondents in such a way that alternate considerations are brought into play. They may suggest orientations to, and linkages between, diverse aspects of the respondent's experience, adumbrating—even inviting—interpretations that make use of particular resources, connections and outlooks. Interviewers may explore incompletely articulated aspects of experience, encouraging respondents to develop topics in ways relevant to their own everyday lives. (Gubrium and Holstein 1997, 120–1)

When using in-depth interviews, researchers usually pay particular attention to how to present themselves, create and maintain trust, and to see the world from the point of view of the interlocutor, and all of this without “going native.” A good interviewer must be informed, but also kind, sensitive, and open. The development of relationships of trust is particularly important in qualitative interviews. The initial phase of the interview is crucial from this point of view: “Whatever is actually said in the opening few minutes of the interview, it must be demonstrated that the interviewer is a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest” (McCracken 1988, 38). This allows the interviewer to communicate to the interviewee that any potentially delicate situations that may develop in the course of the interview will not have any negative consequences. For this reason, it is also important that the introduction is clear and that there are a few minutes of open chat at the beginning of the interview.

The interviewer must also be able to guide the interview without frustrating the creativity of the interviewee; they must above all pay attention and remember what the interviewee says (Kvale 1996). The interviewer must be recognized as knowledgeable, but not adversarial (Rathbun 2008, 698). Indeed, “While remaining active and directing the game, the researcher must know how to be modest and discreet. The informer is the protagonist, and must understand that from the attitude of the person in front of him, made up of attentive listening and concentration which indicates the importance conferred on the interview, of extreme interest because of the opinions expressed . . . of manifest sympathy for the person interviewed” (Kaufmann 2009, 54). To establish a relationship of trust, the interviewer must be neither judgmental nor intrusive, and above all show respect for the interviewee, who has to feel comfortable and competent enough in the interaction to talk back (Miller and Glassner 1997, 106).

The interviewee must perceive that the interviewer has an interest in his or her opinion, and is “not interviewed vaguely about his opinion, but in his capacity of possessing precious knowledge that the interviewer, however much the boss of the game, does not have” (Kaufmann 2009, 51). It is thus important to leave space to the interviewee:

The first rule of interviewing is that if the respondent has something to say, the respondent must be able to say it. If you find yourself talking over the respondent,

interrupting, or holding the floor while the respondent tries to interrupt, something is going wrong with the interview. . . . It is easy to intrude in an interview. You can interrupt the respondent. You can finish the respondent's sentences. You can offer your associations to what the respondent is saying. . . . Never, never fight for control over the interview. The interview is a collaboration. (Weiss 1994, 78)

The interviewer must thus be able not only to listen with great care for key terms, but also for distortions, silences, and misunderstanding. The importance of knowing how to listen without imposing one's own categories is particularly underlined in naturalist approaches. Here, "Specifically, what the listener is after are the expressed 'is's' and 'because's' of his subjects. The 'is' reveals their designations of the things, people, and event—the objectified content of these people's reality. The 'because' reveals the presumed relations among all the designations, the whys and wherefores, the causes, processes, and reasons—in sum, the very logic of their thinking about the content of their reality" (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, 69).

In the course of an interview it is in fact necessary to pay attention to the flow of the conversation. In some cases or moments the interviewer has to stimulate the talk: for example, asking for interesting points to be embellished, or contradictions to be clarified. While it is necessary to leave the interviewees space to talk about what they see as connected with the theme, "it is also true, of course, that some respondents will jump topics with the frequency of a cheap phonograph needle" (McCracken 1988, 40), and they must be politely brought back to the theme.

The ability to conduct an interview also lies in avoiding one of the two partners dominating the conversation. In particular, there might be moments of evident embarrassment. In fact, "during the interview the respondent may not pick up important clues that plead for brevity per answer; some respondents are carried away by their own enthusiasm or vocal artistry, and speak as if starved for an audience. The researchers may have to take forceful steps; for example, gesture with his hands for attention, or study the respondent's breathing-talking rhythm to find the proper point for verbal intervention" (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, 73).

In general, the interviewer must also be sensitive to the emergence of potential problems. As Weiss (1994, 146) observes,

It isn't hard to tell when an interview is going badly. Neither the respondent nor you is relaxed. The respondent indicates discomfort or resistance or antagonism by lapses in attention or sparse responses or outright challenges. Even without this, you are likely to be uncomfortable. You can't get engaged in the interview. You find it hard to listen closely to the respondent. You aren't in touch with the respondent's accent. . . . Your questions are awkward. . . . The interview takes on a survey research quality: you ask a question and then the respondent gives a brief response and waits for the next question.

Although no extraordinary skill is considered necessary to become a good interviewer, it is advised that attention be paid when completing tasks that include introducing the theme, listening to responses and generating new questions, and asking to unpack some terms, “And whilst listening going ‘mm,’ ‘yeah,’ ‘right,’ alongside nodding, laughing, joking, smiling, frowning” (Rapley 2004, 25–6). Suggestions for overcoming difficult moments in the course of an interview include “tricks of the trade”:

Every experienced interviewer will have a number of tactical measures for handling “difficult” respondents: ways of stimulating the inarticulate, loosening the tongue-tied, steering the “run-aways.” . . . All these require gestures tactically appropriate to the problem of hearing and listening: silence, facial expression, body movement, and a host of vocal gestures and questions that probe for such matters as chronology (. . . and then? When was that?), details (tell me more about that, that’s very interesting), clarification (I do not quite understand, but you said earlier . . .), explanations (why? How come?). (Schatzman and Strauss 1973, 74)

During the interview, if the interviewee tends to avoid some themes, they can be approached in a more oblique manner or one can choose to let the interviewee talk about another theme.

While not ideal behavior, nor a recipe for interviewing, and still recognizing that “a respondent who doesn’t want to respond isn’t going to become cooperative because of a question’s wording” (Weiss 1994, 142), some potential strategies for guiding the conversation include:

- offering interpretations, asking the interviewee to comment on them;
- playing devil’s advocate, confronting the interviewee with extreme points of view, the opposite of their own;
- presenting hypothetical questions, such as “What would you do if . . .;”
- asking the interviewee to define an ideal situation: for example, “What, in your opinion, would allow this problem to be approached?”

Sometimes, pauses can serve both the interviewee and the interviewer to overcome moments of mental block. In addition, “Without necessarily asking questions, it is advised to stop during the interview to peruse the grid and check that nothing important has been forgotten” (Kaufmann 2009, 53).

In the relationship between interviewee and interviewer the aspiration is to balance formality and informality. As far as discursive style is concerned, it has been noted that “a first decisive element is oral style. If the interviewer enumerates a list of questions in a melancholy tone or, worse still, reads them as if it were a questionnaire, the interviewee tends to immediately adopt the same style in their responses, limiting themselves to brief phrases corresponding to superficial thoughts that are immediately available, without engaging personally” (Kaufmann 2009, 50). In this sense, the tone should be

“much closer to that of a conversation between two equal individuals than to that of a conversation from above” (Kaufmann 2009, 51), even if “The interviewer must come close to the style of the conversation without letting a real conversation take place: the interview is a piece of work that requires continuous effort. The ideal is to break the hierarchy without falling into equal positions: each of the two partners maintains a different role” (Kaufmann 2009, 51).

The place where the conversation takes place is also important for qualitative interviews. Indeed, the setting influences what is considered an appropriate theme (e.g., private versus public). In general, the place must please the interviewee but also be calm, without excessive noise or potential for external interruptions. If there is someone else present who is definitely influencing the flow of the interview, it is better to involve him or her in order to make their intervention explicit (Weiss 1994, 144). New technology offers the possibility of interviewing interlocutors in distant places, through Skype or other means of cheap communication. While a useful instrument to follow up on previous face-to-face interviews, or as an emergency solution in case face-to-face contacts prove impossible, this possibility has to be handled with care, as technology-mediated contacts can make the building of trust with the interlocutors more difficult and distraction easier.

The conversation is certainly influenced by the socio-biographical characteristics of the researcher, especially those that are most visible such as age, gender, class, and ethnic identity. Even if it is known that the characteristics of the researcher will have an effect on the interview, it is difficult to predict which of the researcher’s characteristics will be important for an interview and in which direction they will influence it, given that some people react better to similarity, while others react better to difference. The important thing is a certain level of self-reflexivity on the potential tensions linked to these dimensions.

Normally, economic compensation is not necessary, and can indeed be counter-productive. Participating in an in-depth interview tends to be gratifying in itself for the interviewee. Forms of intrinsic remuneration include engaging in an unusual form of sociality, with a partner who listens, as “To talk to someone who listens, and listens closely, can in itself be valuable” (Weiss 1994, 122). In this sense, “The researcher interviewer resembles a therapist by encouraging the respondent to develop thoughts and memories, by eliciting the respondent’s underlying emotions, and by listening closely to the respondent’s utterances” (Weiss 1994, 134)—“I’m talking to you like I would to my therapist” (Weiss 1994, 135). In fact, researchers are often surprised by the willingness of the informer to talk. Even where the conversation can bring up memories or roles and convictions that are painful or difficult to discuss, there is often some happiness in being able to express oneself nevertheless (Bourdieu 1993). In general, it has been found that “It is surprising

to note how often informers enter into the role of the good pupil, taking the interview very much to heart and applying themselves to answer each question well” (Kaufmann 2009, 64).

The research on the policing of protest was the most challenging I have carried out in terms of interactions during interviews. Accustomed to interviewing activists I shared a language with, I found I needed to be much more careful when formulating questions to police officers, as the risk of misunderstanding was higher. Especially at the beginning of the interviews, I often felt, if not some dose of reciprocal mistrust, at least a need for reassurance. Given the very macho police culture in an institution that was for a long time the preserve of men, I felt that gender diversity between the interviewer (me, female) and the interviewees (all male) was also an issue on some occasions. The conduction of the interview was also particularly challenging, as I often felt that I was dealing with individuals who, by profession, were accustomed to being on the other side of the table: that is to interrogating, rather than being interrogated.

As police activities are often hectic, I was also forced several times to wait for long periods, which did, however, prove extremely useful for observing, without being much taken note of, the internal and external interactions of police officers. A quite secretive culture, with a related fear of outsiders, seen as potential enemies, was also visible—in particular in requests not to report some (even very banal) information delivered during the conversation.

Given all these challenges, time and patience were, however, often rewarded by long and relaxed interviews, in which some trust, and even empathy, was built. When the atmosphere became relaxed during the course of an interview, it was then possible to go back to apparent contradictions and ask for clarifications. A constant recall of recent examples as illustrations helped the conversation, clarifying the focus of the research and showing the true interest of the researcher. Particularly delicate here was the balance between showing some knowledge of the field, but also the willingness to learn more from the interviewee, overcoming the temptation of self-assurance through showing off scientific competence. Feeling recognized, the interviewees often showed an active interest in the research, even organizing new encounters as well as occasions for participant observation at public-order events.

Analysis

In qualitative research, interpretation is a central task which takes place throughout the research process and is not relegated to any clearly separate phase from data collection. If the qualitative interview is a rich source, it is certainly not an easy one to analyze: “Because the fuller responses obtained

by the qualitative study cannot be easily categorized, their analysis will rely less on counting and correlating and more on interpretation, summary and integration” (Weiss 1994, 3). Multiple interpretations, by interviewee and interviewer, may be present. As Denzin (1991, 68) underlines, given the use of familiar narratives, language plays tricks, displacing what it is supposed to represent. Social distance can bring not only distrust, but also the researcher’s reduced capacity to understand.

Before all else, it must be said that there are as many ways of analyzing interviews as there are epistemological approaches adopted by researchers. Analysis changes according to the type of epistemological approach a researcher subscribes to. Within a positivist epistemology, the interview is conceived as a way of gathering information about a certain reality. Interviews are thus interpreted as sources of facts, behaviors, and attitudes. The interviews must generate valid and trustworthy data, data that are independent of the context of the interview itself. As said, the choice of interviewees and the way in which questions are formulated must follow criteria of representativeness. In an interactionist approach, on the other hand, interviewee and interviewer actively collaborate in the conversation to produce meaning, which then lies at the center of the analysis (Silverman 1993, chap. 5). In an interpretivist approach, the attention is rather on the practices of elaboration of different, socially constructed, versions of the world (Seale 1998). In particular, the analysis of the narrative looks, not only at the temporal and causal organization of facts, but also at the “value judgment to make sense of this particular life experience. In turn, such a view implies that the most crucial information reside not in the answers given to specific questions, but rather in the narrative organization itself” (Chanfrault-Duchet 1991, 77). Rather than being a problem, subjectivity, defined as the manner in which the respondent perceives his/her situation and activities in social structures and networks, is at the very core of the analysis (Rosenthal 1993, 64). The attention here is on the story as a “fiction that becomes real”—as “People organize their personal biographies and understand them through stories they create to explain and justify their life experience” (Richardson 1990, 23).

Whichever approach is preferred, analysis presupposes the *organization* of consistent *material* on the basis of various criteria, in chronological order, in thematic fields, and in context. Reasoning then proceeds via comparisons, implications, and lateral thinking (Silverman 2000). The analysis of the text can follow different options that include attention to the conversation analytic, group dynamics, or substantive issues. Indeed it is observed that “Immersed in listening to recordings (or reading transcriptions), the researchers continue to make decisions. They evaluate whether the person seems sincere or is lying, puts a hypothesis into question or supports it, trains the magnifying glass on the biography of the information or on a concept” (Kaufmann 2009, 94).

Above all, it is important to recognize the interviewee's mode in analysis, and distinguish between description, narration, and interpretation. The interviewee may describe facts, elaborate narrations, or propose their own interpretations. In the analysis of various excerpts it is thus necessary to identify passages characterized by dissimulation, which is not necessarily lying. It has in fact been noted that, if "people interviewed do not lie more than they do in normal conversations, and much less from the moment they feel involved" (Kaufmann 2009, 69), nevertheless, they "sometimes tell stories far removed from reality not because they are lying to the researcher, but because they are telling themselves, not just the researcher, a story that they truly believe in: it is in fact the story that gives sense to their life" (Kaufmann 2009, 69).

A first step for the analysis of qualitative interviews is transcription. While there is agreement on the obvious recommendation of clearly identifying each partner, there is none on the necessity of transcribing all the material, or on the utility of a literal transcription, including non-verbal sounds, pauses, and emphases. While some scholars prefer a complete transcription with as much detail as possible, others have proposed more selective strategies. For example, Kaufmann (2009, 82) writes, "I also transcribe the interviews, but in a particular, fragmentary (one phrase per file or a longer extract but on the same theme), partial (I only transcribe that which is worthy of interest) manner. What do I judge to be worthy of interest? Beautiful, creative, expressive phrases; interesting, informative situations, intriguing episodes; well-argued indigenous thought categories; elements close to the hypotheses in the process of being elaborated."

Although there are no formal interpretive rules, the utility of key words or themes for organizing the material has been underlined, so that "Analysis then becomes a process of sifting, comparing and contrasting the different ways in which these themes emerge within the data. What ideas and representations cluster around them? What associations are being established? Are particular meanings being mobilized? Is a certain reading implied by the organization of the text?" (Tonkiss 1998, 255). The use of transcription indeed entails coding (or indexing) phases and categorization.

If analysis here must be detailed, it is nevertheless necessary to avoid the risk of fragmenting the text too much. In fact, it has been noted that "when analysing data it is not necessary to provide an account of every line of the text under study. It is often more appropriate and more informative to be selective in relation to the data, extracting those sections which provide the richest source of analytic material. This does not mean that one simply selects the data extracts that support the argument, while ignoring more troubling or ill-fitting sections of the text" (Tonkiss 1998, 253). From this point of view, a general rule is to "be faithful to a text's overall meaning, even when analysing its details" (Tonkiss 1998). In addition, it is often precisely the contradictions within a text or unexpected aspects that offer the greatest scope for innovative

interpretations. In the analysis of text, variations, incongruence, and hesitations are in fact often interesting for interpretation, as they reveal tensions between different visions, principles, values, and interests. Distinguishing between emphasis and detail has also been suggested: “As discourse analysts are concerned not simply with the surface or manifest meanings of a text, but with an often intricate way in which these meanings are put together, they aim to examine the twists and turns through which data are shaped” (Tonkiss 1998, 257).

Along with emphases, it is also important to take silences into account: “to read along with the meanings that are being created, to look to the way the text is organized and to pay attention to how things are being said. At the same time, discourse analysis often requires the researcher to read against the grain of the text, to look to silences or gaps, to make conjectures about alternative accounts which are excluded by omission, as well as those which are countered by rhetoric” (Tonkiss 1998, 258).

Coding procedures change, on a continuum, according to the degree of deductive versus inductive equilibrium in the research design. To analyze material from interviews, McCracken (1998) suggests the following passages:

- First reading: observation—each (relevant) utterance creates an observation;
- Second reading: take the observations and interpret them: first by themselves, then according to evidence in the transcript, and then according to previous literature and cultural review;
- Third reading: connect observations with each other.

An analysis of material from in-depth interviews that follows the process of analytical induction proceeds via the following steps:

- a) rough definition of the problem;
- b) hypothetical explanation of the problem;
- c) examination of cases to determine their fit with the hypothesis;
- d) if there is a lack of fit, either reformulation of the hypothesis, or redefinition of the problem in order to exclude negative cases;
- e) hypothesis is confirmed after analysis of a few cases; re-elaboration to take into account negative cases;
- f) continue procedures until no more negative cases are encountered. (Lindesmith 1968)

In interpreting the data, a balance between the structuration of thought around pre-existing hypotheses, which indicate questions to seek answers to, and flexibility, which allows new ideas to be taken on, must be maintained. It is thus recommended to avoid ending the analysis too early. In general, “It is typical that textual materials are analysed in a two-step process, first, to refine theoretical categories and generate new ones, often by review of an explanatory sample

of texts, and second, to apply newly defined codes to the broad body of text” (Johnston 2002, 69).

While quantitative analysis underlines technique, in qualitative research a certain amount of tension between technique and imagination is recognized to underlie the cognitive process. If rationality allows concepts to be honed, the creative process is activated through less conscious processes (Kaufmann 2009, 86). Indeed, “the new hypothesis comes from an unexpected connection and functions according to a hypertext logic that opens in all directions. But it is never alone, it is articulated in a tangle of other hypotheses and concepts, thereby constituting the model under construction” (Kaufmann 2009, 1996).

In the research on protest policing, the in-depth interviews helped, first, in acquiring a contextual knowledge about the structuration of a police intervention, and second in allowing for the use of a rich narrative style when reporting interviews’ results. So, for instance, it was important to reconstruct the complex management of public order that, in the words of a Florentine official, involved a series of different actors. In the words of an interviewee:

Every section concerned with public order . . . starts with the communication [by the organizers] to the *Questura*, three days before the demonstration. On this basis the *Questore* is informed of the demonstration, makes an evaluation of the route, the size and the type of the march, and then sends out orders on this basis that indicate the following: what type of demonstration it will be, who is directing the forces of public order, who is being given duties, the size of the force to be assigned, and possible special assignments relative to the particular demonstration. Each demonstration is normally preceded by an inspection of the place where the demonstration is to take place . . . and so the ASNU is called to empty all the litter bins, ENEL to check all the electrical apparatus, SIP to check telephones, and the water board, etc. There are orders which indicate how the place is to be inspected, and which give reminders of the legal regulations of the event: it can be illegal to do things in certain ways, and this gives an indication of how things must be done. (Interview Florence, November 10, 1994)

Interviews, however, also helped me to single out different strategies, and link them to the police perceptions of the demonstrators. Nearly all the officials interviewed agreed on defining the strategy used at the time of the research as a strategy designed to seek a consensus through “dialogue” with protestors. I then selected this interview as making this point neatly:

I would say that there has been a period—which does not apply for certain demonstrations such as those at the football stadium for example—in which on each occasion a dialogue is sought with whichever go-between comes forward. We always look to avoid incidents. If you think about it, all demonstrations, of whatever kind or type, are normally preceded by direct contacts with police headquarters or the officials of the *Digos* or other forces to agree on the course of the march, in order to know who

we should speak with, to see what kind of situation we will be faced with, to understand what the real issues of the march are, so that we can prepare a possible dialogue with the people who are organizing the demonstration. In this sense, the tactics, particularly during the 1980s, have changed the style of interlocution, that is demonstrators do not find themselves in front of masked men with helmets and batons: there is always some attempt at mediation. (Interview Florence, November 10, 1994)

This impression was confirmed by triangulation of knowledge coming from different interviews but also from participant observation. The information thus gathered showed that, in spite of the often-quoted principle of “neutrality,” where the police claim that “the reaction of the police is always the same,” in reality responses to a range of challenges to public order reveal diverse models of *policing*, each formulated with regard to the particular problem posed—or, better, perceived. This point, repeated in several interviews, emerged in a particularly well-articulated manner in an interview with a young vice-superintendent of the *Reparto Mobile*, who observed the following about the policing of the protests of a squatted youth center:

Clearly, when we are talking about Leoncavallo, that is demonstrations with a particularly high political element, then we always keep our distance. With the ultra football fans, the opposite is the case: we get right in amongst them. With the ultras, if you give them 50 metres, they start throwing stones at you. When we want to show our muscles, especially with the Leoncavallo people, the policy of the *Questura* in the last few years has usually been to send a massive and highly visible police presence, of a size such that it is made very clear that the balance of forces is tipped strongly in our favour. With such a visible presence, they can see that if they misbehave themselves we are going to be there en masse . . . For the demonstration of May 1st, we had a purely passive presence. With the workers on May 1st, it's almost like it was our celebration, our presence is purely a formality, with the idea that we are there simply to demonstrate our own presence. Obviously, we are always alert, and on the spot (even if, maybe, more hidden), because you never know when someone might get into the crowd and cause a disturbance. However, we never put on our helmets on May 1st, we just walk along quietly at the front of the march, with the utmost calmness. And it's really because there is no longer that sense of opposition with the workers' movement nowadays. (Interview Milan, November 24, 1994)

This picture was further confirmed by the other interviews, which helped to single out some main models, as well as to illustrate each. For each policing model I then created a code, and sub-codes specifying police techniques of deployment, equipment, self-conceptions, and the image of protestors. For large demonstrations organized by the trade unions or political parties, the reading of the interviews allowed me to discover that a *cooperative* model of managing public order seemed to predominate. This was based on collaboration between the organizers and the police force, with policing oriented towards protecting, in equal measure, demonstrators and potential “targets of risk.” As one official from Milan observed:

Demonstrations by workers, civil servants, whatever, we're there for all of them. Also because we are no longer a force opposed to them. In fact, people see us as workers ourselves, who are there to guarantee everyone's security . . . What I always say now is that *we are not there to stop them from causing a riot, but rather that we now accompany the demonstration to make sure they can demonstrate without being disturbed themselves.* (Interview Milan, November 24, 1994)

In these cases, there was awareness among the police that the legitimacy of a demonstration lies in the willingness of the protesters to avoid upsetting the precarious balance of public order. In concrete terms, the common interest is that the "peaceful demonstrators" head up the march: "If the head of the march is made up of peaceful people, whom we can trust, then the march unfolds normally" (Interview Milan, October 18–19, 1994).

In contrast, a more *negotiated* intervention of the police characterizes more disruptive protests—road or rail blockades, for example—of workers, the unemployed, homeless, and so on. In these cases, the police officers we interviewed saw themselves as mediators who must make a certain presence visible to the protesters, at the same time as reducing inconveniences for other citizens: "we try to plan deviations for the traffic, by collaborating with the head of the *Vigilanza Urbana* (traffic squad), we thus try to avoid exactly what the protesters are aiming to do—that is paralyse the traffic, create problems for everyone—by blocking the traffic coming in one direction or the other, deviating it for a while, creating alternative routes around the streets as far as possible" (Interview Milan, December 27, 1994). The police, intervening in this case in a "visible" way, often interpose themselves to avoid direct conflict—for example, between the demonstrators and drivers who might try and force their way through the roadblock. The roadblock is thus tolerated, but only for a period of time judged sufficient to "express" the protest: "Generally we find a way of mediating. That is, by telling them, 'OK, we won't intervene, if you're here for a quarter of an hour, we can tolerate the road block, but more than that, I ask you, no!'" (Interview Milan, October 18, 1994).

A third model, based on a kind of *ritualized standoff*, appeared to be the dominant approach to protests by the youth clubs associated with autonomous groups. In many of the demonstrations by autonomous groups the police were present in numbers judged sufficient to discourage any violence. Their equipment was, in general, "combat gear," with a helmet under the arm and a baton (simply putting the helmet on can in itself be a good means of dissuasion). Large cordons were deployed to defend "sensitive targets," and to prevent the march from deviating from its planned route. As one officer of the Milanese *Reparto Mobile* explained:

With the autonomous groups, it is a question let's say of maximum attention, . . . with maximum attention for the number of police officers present in the streets. Everything goes calmly, let's say, as far as we're concerned. However, at the same

time, there is a certain risk present . . . You see, you feel, that at any moment something could break out. The way of approaching this, generally speaking, is always clear in this case, that if they are going past certain parts of the city, public buildings or offices, etc., they are all covered by forces of order to avoid them becoming the target of various attacks. (Interview Milan, November 21, 1994).

A fourth model emerged as based on the *total isolation* of “troublemakers.” It foresees complete control of the area at risk and the movement of persons considered “dangerous” for public order. The principal application of this model of police involvement was during football matches, above all those which involve some kind of traditional rivalry between the fans. The police interventions in this case were based on a massive investment of energy and resources. This long excerpt details the everyday public order measures on Sundays with soccer games:

In my opinion, all in all the situation which creates the most worries for us, from the point of view of public order, is the football stadium. In the sense that you get so many people at an event like that. In Milan that means 70–80,000 people. In Bergamo, 30,000. They stay in the stadium, they meet up, they go wherever they want, on the underground for example . . . for us, for sure, it’s the hardest job we do. It’s the most tiring work, it’s the thing that takes the most time, because a day at the stadium begins in fact at 8 a.m., with the service that goes to check the inside of the stadium, to see if they have hidden any sticks or blunt objects, anything that could be used to hurt the opposing fans. That’s 8 in the morning, and the match is at half past three in the afternoon. . . . We have to meet up, assemble, get our equipment together, set off, etc. And sometimes we finish at 8 in the evening. And then maybe there is the escort for these people. We have to wait until the train leaves, see that everything is peaceful. . . . Often we are deployed to take the people from the trains. A train arrives—usually it would never arrive in the centre of Milan, for security reasons it arrives at Sesto San Giovanni, making use of the fact that there is an underground station there—so therefore they take the underground, without stopping, and they are accompanied directly to the stadium, that is in Piazzale Lotto. It’s a kind of special train. The journey is quite a long one: 35–40 minutes, with us in helmets standing in the underground. It’s a heavy situation. Especially the return journey. You’ve already done six, seven, eight hours of service. (Interview Milan, October 18/19, 1994)

As was confirmed by our eyewitness observations at the stadium, this total isolation was maintained both outside and inside the stadium. Inside the stadium, the two groups of fans were kept apart, often by creating open spaces (segments of empty stadium seats) that separated the two potential adversaries. Police cordons formed close to the fans of the home team and on the edges of the field. The officers were overtly equipped for the defense of public order, with helmets, batons, and protective devices. The police involvement was designed to prevent contact between the two groups of fans, whereas they did not stop them throwing various types of objects (money, plastic bottles full of water, and objects taken from the toilets). The concern with separating the

two groups of supporters was also evident outside the stadium, both before and after the match. Here, police officers and *Carabinieri*, present in large numbers and equipped for combat duty, collected the supporters of the visiting team from the railway station and bus stops, surrounded them with a police cordon that closed the group in on all four sides, and escorted them to the visitors' entrance, where the fans had to submit to a brief search. At the exit to the stadium, the supporters of the visiting team had to wait until their rival home fans had been moved on. Before the doors of the guest fans' section were opened, the police created what one official defined as a "*bonifica*" or "reclaimed space," distanced from the spaces where the other fans and onlookers stood. The guest fans were then surrounded by a police cordon once again, and reaccompanied to the trains and buses.

The interviews also showed how much police reactions to demonstrations were linked to knowledge police had about the disturbances, as well as their role and the role that other actors play: notably political power and public opinion. In general, the sociological literature on the police has already emphasized the diffusion of stereotypes on the origins of disorders, and of those considered responsible for breaking the rules. (Some recurrent themes have been singled out in the police definition of potential troublemakers as mainly *young*, "*outsiders*" (immigrants, ethnic minority members or "agents provocateurs"), deviants, and *disadvantaged socioeconomic groups*.) More specific to political disorders are the stereotypes related to "conspiracy" theories—such as the "masked man," the "rotten apple," or the communist agitator (della Porta and Reiter 1998). Our research allowed us to uncover a different classification, by codifying the twofold distinction between demonstrators who are either "*good*" or "*bad*" by nature. The recognition of a certain degree of legitimacy for protest permitted the justification of actions that were more radical, perhaps even involving a certain amount of aggression towards the police. This emerged, among others, in the following statement during an interview:

One has to evaluate the mood of the demonstrators: For sure a demonstration by *cassa integrati* [people on unemployment benefits] who come to carry out illegal acts against the officers who are there to show their presence and manage public order—and I don't just mean acts of violence, but also mention other things that are much more widespread, which are generally not pursued, like spitting or verbal abuse—now, obviously these things could be pursued, but clearly they are made by people who are angry and exasperated . . . it must be seen in a, let's say, wider perspective. That is, *because the police officer at that moment has offered a service, in a practical sense, in fact a moral service, you might say, that is why we must face up to the demands of the situation, try to tolerate, if you like, even the most angry demonstrations, because they might be people who have genuine motives for this. Certainly, the same behavior by football fans, or young people who just want to provoke us, that's a standing order, that is certainly a different thing altogether.* (Interview Milan, November 19, 1994, emphasis added).

The capacity of protestors to self-police demonstrations also emerged as an important key for the police in determining the proper strategy.

In-Depth Interviews: Some Conclusions

Qualitative in-depth interviews have been very often used in social movement studies, where they not only provide a way of overcoming the limited information contained in written sources but, especially, answer central questions on the micro-dynamics of alternative forms of political participation. In most cases, researchers have used outlines which focus on life within social movement organizations as well as personal experiences with protest. We also noted that in-depth interviews have been preferred by scholars who pay more attention to people's interpretations of reality. In this sense, they have contributed to theory building, but also to theory testing, albeit without the generalizing strength of quantitative research designs. Projects based on interviews involve a varying number of activists who do not represent the (unknown) universe, but rather important theoretical dimensions. As mentioned, the quality of the information collected in this way is influenced by the complex relations between interviewers and interviewees, in particular the interviewer's capacity to stimulate participation and careful listening.

Beyond the quality of information gathered, a careful analysis implies the recognition of the interviewee's narrative modes, a deep reading and rereading of hundreds of transcribed pages, and their arrangement and rearrangement. If qualitative interviews are a relatively inexpensive research technique as far as data collection is concerned, their analysis require painful—but rewarding—work on a large volume of material. In sum, as Blee and Taylor (2002, 113) note, “Social movement scholars who use semi-structured interviewing techniques must present interviews in sufficient detail that the reader can judge the strengths and limitations of their interpretation. That means taking care to avoid using most dramatic data that might not be the most significant. Moreover, the presentation of such work should be consistent with the inconsistencies in the interviews, which should be explained, not omitted.”

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11 Life Histories

Donatella della Porta

Life histories are a particular type of in-depth interview. In a life history a subject tells his/her history, although information about the context may also be included. According to McCracken (1988, 19), life stories are accounts given by an individual about his/her life; they become life histories when they are validated by other sources. Differently than in personal documents, the object is the individual whose history we reconstruct (Angell 1945), and differently than with biographical materials, the source of information is the individual. While self-biographies, memoirs, or diaries are written for various purposes, life histories are collected, usually through interviews, for the specific purpose of the research (see Table 11.1).

In life histories, the interviewer plays an active role: “The sociologist who gathers a life history takes steps to ensure that it covers everything we want to know, that no important facts or events are slighted, that what purports to be factual squares with other available evidence and that the subject interpretations are honestly given” (Becker 2002, 79). Also, differently from interviews with key informants, who are chosen for their specific expertise, the aim here is to reconstruct the individual history. Nevertheless, life histories can be topical, in that they focus on specific aspects of individual lives: if someone is interviewed as an activist the narration will select different arguments than if she is interviewed as, say, a mother. In contrast to surveys, questionnaires are not used (if not as a sort of accompanying technique). The instrument is usually an open outline, even if, in projects which require team work, there is more attention to a common structure, in order to allow for better comparison. Information thus collected is rarely codified and analyzed through quantitative techniques.

Scholars in various fields of the human sciences have made use of life histories. Anthropologists (Kluckhohn 1945), psychologists (Allport 1942), and literary critics (Weintraub 1975) have joined oral historians, in an interest in the lives, not only of famous persons, but also of “normal” ones (Passerini 1978). In sociology, in the 1930s and 1940s, the Chicago school considered biographical materials as the most important source for research (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–20). Since the 1980s, discontent with structuralism and quantitative techniques has pushed attention towards life histories (Bertaux 1981).

Table 11.1 Definition of Life Histories

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- The source is the **individual** actor (different to with *personal documents*)
 - The focus is on **personal experiences** (different to *interviews with experts*)
 - The time covered is the **entire life** of an individual (different to with *biographical materials*)
 - The research procedure is **interactive** (different to with *autobiographies*)
 - The instrument is an **open** scheme (different to the *survey*)
 - Used for **qualitative** analysis (different to *life course studies*)
-

Life histories have been employed in particular for the study of marginal groups in a population: prostitutes or professional thieves (Conwell and Sutherland 1937), transsexuals (Bogdan 1974) or African-Americans (Frazier 1940; Johnson 1941), youth gangs (Shaw 1930, 1931, 1936; Whyte 1993) or the poor (Lewis 1966). If life histories are widespread in research on deviance, youth, and the family, they are less so in political sociology and political science. Also rare has been the use of life histories in social movement studies (della Porta 1992), even if with valuable exceptions, especially in the analysis of militants of underground organizations (e.g. Boellinger 1981; Jaeger 1981; Neidhardt 1982a and 1982b; della Porta 1990 and 1995; Zwerman 1992; Moyano 1995).

In the following, I discuss the different phases of the research, and the main dilemmas in each of them when using life histories: from theories and concepts, to the research outline, the selection of the interviewees, the relations between interviewer and interviewee during the interview itself, and the analysis of the empirical results. I illustrate my arguments with reference to a broad project carried out during the early 1980s by an interdisciplinary team of historians, sociologists, and political scientists at the Carlo Cattaneo Institute in Bologna. Financed by the Emilia Romagna regional government in the aftermath of the bombings at the Bologna railway station in August 1980, and in memory of the more than 100 victims, the research aimed to understand clandestine political violence by both left-wing and right-wing militants, mainly through the use of life histories (della Porta 1990 and 1995).

Which Theories and Which Concepts?

Life histories can be linked to a range of epistemologies: they have been used in research of a neo-positivist character oriented towards grasping reality, just as they have been used in research that privileges the construction of reality by the subject. Although life histories are considered better adapted to inductive paths—from research to theory—they are also useful for deductively

checking how a theory holds up when faced with empirical reality. Theories and concepts are not in fact of secondary importance for research carried out using qualitative methods: anything but. The very richness of data generated through qualitative research has led it to be noted that “the scholar who does not control these data will surely sink without a trace” (McCracken 1988, 22). In addition, the criticism of tending to overlook the problem of the social and cultural construction of “variables” used, as well as concentrating on themes for which datasets are available, has been addressed more often to quantitative scholars.

If anything, life histories have the merit of tackling themes of increasing importance that other methods leave in shadow. The study of the imaginary, of mentality, of collective representations can offer significant contributions to the understanding of societies undergoing rapid transformations that sweep away consolidated subcultures and acquired values. Life history interviews allow us, above all, to reconstruct the modes in which wide-reaching historical events penetrate the collective imaginary, filtered through the subjectivity of ordinary women and men. Information on the way in which a situation appears to members of an affected society also allows us to understand the actions of individuals as consequences of their perceptions. Particularly adapted to the testing of hypotheses elaborated in the field of symbolic interactionism, life histories allow for understandings of different questions linked to cognitive mechanisms for making sense of external reality and acting on it.

In the study of activism, historians have long experience with life histories, used either to collect information on events or groups for which archives are particularly poor, or as materials for the study of mentalities and culture. Examples of the research aimed at collecting information on events and activists are Barnett and Njama’s (1966) study of the Mau Mau in Kenya, where the activist, Njama, offered the historian, Barnett, precious information about the struggle for independence, as well as the main rituals in the movement; Painter’s (1979) reconstruction of the life of Hosea Hudson, a black activist in the Communist Party in the United States; and Kann’s (1981) account of the life of Joe Rapoport, a Jewish migrant from Ukraine and a socialist activist in the United States. A large oral history project covered the student movement of the late 1960s in Germany, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, and the United States through 230 interviews with former activists, whose memories formed the basis for an international oral history of the movement (Fraser 1988). The stated aim here was to see the movement through the eyes of its activists.

In a different approach, attention focuses on mentalities, symbols, narrative distortion, and identity building. In his book on rank-and-file political activists, Italian historian Montaldi (1971) addressed the way in which the memory of the Fascist regime was filtered through militants’ ideology. Similarly, Luisa Passerini (1989) analyzed the memory of members of Italian

clandestine groups to describe a history which is never factual but, rather, “includes the symbolic sphere and the mentalities,” through a strategy of imagination but also silences.

In both types of contribution, individual activists are considered as important for their capacity to act beyond existing external constraints (Balan and Jelin 1980). The interviewees are seen as participating in the making of history, which is thus subtracted from the dominance of professional historians (Passerini 1981; Bertaux 1980). Against a vision of history as made by governors, generals, and diplomats, oral history places normal people as important actors in the making of history (Barkin 1976; Buhle 1981). By giving normal people the possibility to speak up, and so going beyond official documents, “these studies emphasize the importance of understanding the way in which history is transformed in individual cognition, how public events intervene into private life, how perceptions of the world influence action” (della Porta 1992, 173). Through the diverse forms of biography, “attention shifts from laws, statistics, administrators and governments, to people” (Thompson 1978, 223). The use of oral sources thus responds to “the need to analyze every aspect of everyday life to restore sense to activities that seem to be losing it, sucked out by current, alienated uses” (Passerini 1978, XXXVII). In this conception, even if History is made, in a certain measure, behind their backs, people nevertheless play a vital role in giving it sense, direction, and an ultimate goal (Buhle 1981, 209).

In social movement studies, life histories have been considered as particularly suited “for researchers interested in generating rich and textured detail about social processes, understanding the intersection between personal narratives and social structures, and focusing on individual agency and social context” (Corrigall-Brown and Ho 2013, 678). In fact, this method allows a focus upon participants’ subjectivities, locating them within broad social, political, and cultural contexts. Life histories have in fact been used for addressing questions related to the influence of primary socialization on political behavior, the role of social networks in recruitment into political organizations, the motivations for political activities, and the successive shifts in the perception of reality as influenced from involvement in a movement subculture. In his pioneering work, Kenneth Keniston (1968) reconstructed the life of young radicals in Cambridge, Massachusetts, pointing at the role of socialization in the family in the development of left-wing ideas. Following what was called a “red diaper” syndrome, student movement activists came from liberal families, where they had learned to challenge but had also, in part, absorbed their parents’ values. Radicalization processes are singled out as complex phenomena, involving gradual, intellectual, and emotional dynamics.

Life histories also allow a better look at the cultural life of a group. As Blee (2003, 201) notes, “first, life histories are clues to the fashioning of identity

and ideology.” Also, they “string together life events in sequences, suggesting how people understand the patterning of their political and personal lives. These patterns help us untangle the causes and effects of their political affiliation, making possible such judgments as whether belonging to a racist group resulted from, or precipitated, particular experiences . . . they provide information both on the events that crystallize political consciousness and mobilize to action and on networks and institutions that nourish (or fail to nourish) activist identities and beliefs during periods of political inactivity” (Blee 2003, 202).

Covering the evolution of the experiences of activists, life histories allow us to reconstruct the path of involvement in specific forms of political participation, the role of networks in socialization, the continuities, but also the turning points at the intersections between individual experiences and environmental transformations. In Kathleen Blee’s research on women in racist movements in the United States (2003), the life histories of 34 women allowed her to connect identities and ideologies, starting from the point of view of the participants. Even though the activists talked of a “conversion,” their life histories clearly signaled that the development of racist attitudes followed, rather than preceded, recruitment into a racist organization. They also helped in reconstructing the development of those organizations, and the influence of macro-transformations on them. With similar questions in mind, Javier Auyero looked in depth at the life histories of two female activists in Latin America, reconstructing the processes of socialization to politics and the impact of environmental transformations. In his words, the book looked at the “intersection of contentious politics and human life,” as the ways in which the two activists “live the protest (what they do, what they think, how they feel during the episodes) are deeply informed by their biographies” (Auyero 2003, 3). Corrigan-Brown (2011) compared the life histories of about 60 activists in four different movements, looking at transformations of individual identities within broader networks.

In carrying out my research on political violence in Italy in the 1970s (della Porta 1990 and 1995), although I first and foremost aimed to analyze the social construction of external reality by the militants, I also used some evidence (triangulated with other sources) in order to improve our knowledge of relevant events. While I did not expect, then, to extract from life histories specific information on episodes of terrorism or individual responsibility for crimes perpetrated by the underground groups, I considered them as an irreplaceable methodological tool for analyzing individual participation, its stages, and its dynamics. Life histories proved, in fact, particularly useful for illuminating the events of public importance in which the interviewees had been directly involved and, in particular, those aspects with respect to which their personal experience was most direct. On subjects such as the stories of the legal organizations they had been active in and the functioning

of clandestine groups, the interviewees were considered as privileged witnesses. The information they supplied, checked through written sources of a different nature, served to reconstruct some environments and situations. My focus was, however, on how activists saw their environment, opportunities, and constraints. Also, I wanted to investigate the everyday life of rank-and-file militants, as they remembered it. Through the life histories, I was able to understand the choices for joining and maintaining militancy in armed groups, beginning from knowledge of the perceptions of the external world shared among militants, of their definition of the advantages and disadvantages of participation, of their process of political socialization, and of the dynamics of the structuration of individual identity. Placing political activity within the global existence of each individual, this knowledge allowed me to single out a series of dynamics related to the motivations and incentives that produced the passage into illegal organizations, and the paths within these to be detected. The study of the imaginary, of mentality, of collective representations was an indispensable tool for understanding the motivations that led many young people to the most extreme forms of violence. In sum, within a pluralist methodological perspective, although privileging the value of life histories in the social construction of the external reality, I have also exploited the results in order to increase information on different phenomena.

In conclusion, life histories are privileged by those who share a few assumptions (see Table 11.2). In the first place, they reflect the belief that history is made up of ordinary people (not just of elites), which focuses their attention on common people. In addition, the use of life histories responds to the conviction that ordinary people have a sophisticated understanding of the world around them, and that this understanding motivates their actions. It thus reflects the relevance assigned by the researcher to the understanding of processes at the micro level: Dilthey (1996) was the first to see life histories as suited to an “understanding” based on empathy. Through life histories, attention is also fixed on the flow of time, and especially on the relation between past and present: “rather than limiting itself to the slice of an individual situation located at the present, the focus of interest is upon people’s complete lives or, at the very least, upon a significant portion of people’s lives” (Miller 2000, 2). Finally, the life history places the individual in a wider space, where lives

Table 11.2 Epistemological Assumptions About the Use of Life Histories

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- History is (also) made by normal people (versus only élites make history)
 - Normal people have an important type of knowledge of their own world (versus only élites have important knowledge)
 - Actors build their own world (versus structural determinism)
 - Subjective interpretation of reality counts
-

are lived within social networks. From this point of view, the approach may be defined as processual and holistic. The attention is then firmly focused on interaction between private and public history.

The exploratory value of life histories, like other techniques of qualitative research, has also been underlined. However, as Howard Becker (2002, 83) observes, “the life-history, by virtue again of its wealth of detail, can be important also at those times when an area of study has grown stagnant, has pursued the investigation of a few variables with ever-increasing precision but has received dwindling increments of knowledge from the pursuit,”

What to Ask? The Interview Outline

Some methodological problems in the use of life histories are related to the comparability of the results from different life histories. When a life experience is recounted in the space of a few hours, a process of selection is necessarily at work. Two interviews, even with the same person, can differ from each other in the aspects they emphasize, the biographical periods they spend more time upon, the personal “style” of the narration, and so on. Moreover, the outcome is strongly influenced by the results of the interaction between that specific interviewer and that specific interviewee—so much so that two interviewers are very likely to obtain different life histories from the same person.

Some technical advice can help improve the comparability of different life histories. First of all, an outline is normally used for orienting the different interviewees on the same range of topics. The broader the project, both in terms of numbers of interviewees and also of interviewers, the more necessary some form of structuration of the narrations.

The reviews of life-history research on movement activists indicate some of the topics that should be included in such an outline. Questions concerning family background, educational atmosphere, school experiences, and peer groups in adolescence allow the collection of information on primary and secondary socialization processes. Material from these biographical phases is important for understanding the influence of historical events and family environment on future political choices. The longest sections of an outline usually deal with the phases of the activist’s life more directly connected to political activity. In order to study the formation of collective identities it is necessary to have detailed information on the whole process of political socialization, from the first encounters with politics to the choice of political activism. An outline should therefore include questions on early political experiences, such as the age at which they started to participate in politics, the historical period in which they took place, the political organization of first involvement, the kind of people involved, and so on. As far as the evolution of

political commitment is concerned, narration should deal with the meaning of political choices for everyday life, the relations with friend-comrades, and the image of the world that participation in a group enforces. Also, as more salient events in individual life tend to be better recalled, a useful strategy is to ask the interviewee to list some memorable events, and then to locate other historical facts around them. This allows in particular the reconstruction of interactions between protest campaigns and individual life courses.

In the case of the research carried out by the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo on militants in left- and right-wing clandestine organizations active in the 1970s, for example, we prepared a six-page outline which listed the themes held to be of interest as a result of their potential capacity to explain paths of radicalization in social and political commitment. The attention was on everyday life, even if some turning points coincided with public events—protests or episodes of repression—and were narrated at length. The outline was divided into the following parts:

- 1) family of origin and that family's environment;
- 2) the subjective personal experience of primary socialization;
- 3) the formation of adult personality;
- 4) associational and political participation;
- 5) political commitment in the clandestine organization;
- 6) the conclusion of the experience in the clandestine group.

Within each theme, sub-themes and keywords were listed, along with some central elements about which the interviewees were invited to speak. Prompts we used referred, for instance, to preferred books or movies, or the narration of “typical days.” The theme of political and associational participation, considered particularly important for analyzing radicalization as a process inserted in a relational context (della Porta 1995), was structured as follows:

4. Political and associational participation

4.1. Initiation into militancy

- when did the interviewee begin political activity: age
- when did they begin political activity: subjective perception of the epoch and the historical–social climate
- places of politics: factory, local area, school
- places of politics: groups
- who inducted/inspired/convinced them: friends, relations, colleagues
- the occasion that marked the beginning of political activity
- problems the groups dealt with
- subject's profession

* *place emphasis on*: the sense of this new experience for the subject

- 4.2. The evolution of militancy before entry into clandestinity
- passages between groups
 - associational participation: progression
 - the last group participated in before entering clandestinity: ideal principles, fields of intervention, action repertoires
 - militant companions
 - level of commitment: time and form of political activity
- * *place emphasis on*: perception of own destiny as an individual/generation.

Even though we started our encounters with questions related to first socialization in the family of origin, we often noted a limited interest among activists to narrate this part of their life (very quickly tended to come a statement such as “. . . and then in 1968 I participated in my first demonstration . . .”). Usually, after a couple of attempts to bring the discussion back to the first years of their life, we allowed the narration to follow the interviewee’s preferences, filling gaps later in the interview.

Whom to Interview? The Sampling

Another concern with the use of life histories refers to the generalizability of the interviewee’s experience. How representative are the activists we interview? How typical is their life? Random sampling in life-history research is virtually impossible. Besides the obvious problem of research on social movements related to the fact that the universe of activists is rarely known, there are problems specific to life-history research. First, especially for the most radical social movement organizations, the very problem of finding enough activists available to tell their biographies should not be underestimated. To the often widespread general mistrust of sociological studies—and the simple lack of free time—one should add a specific mistrust of the attempt to understand political choices through private events, as biographies are often considered by activists. Second, even when activists are willing to be interviewed, it is very expensive to carry out and, especially, to transcribe the number of life histories adequate for a representative sample. Third, even when enough interviews are conducted and transcribed, it would be virtually impossible to meaningfully analyze the resulting material.

The effects of some of these problems on the generalizability of results can, however, be reduced if some specific criteria are met in choosing the interviewees. Multiplication and diversification of the sample have been suggested (Bertaux 1980), at times contrary to and at others coordinated with the tendency to concentrate on the life histories of real groups of individuals engaged

in common activities in everyday life and, thus, able to provide an image of the multiple aspects of events (Ferrarotti 1981). The originally anthropological proposal of investigating social networks was accompanied by that of collecting crossed stories about a social formation of small dimensions (Gagnon 1980). For example, research on collective action has underlined the strong heuristic capacity of social networks which renders research on small groups particularly interesting, at least for the analysis of some specific aspects, including the formation of collective identity. It should, nevertheless, be borne in mind that interest can often be oriented to developing a typology of paths of militancy, and thus to the existence of diversity that a study of social networks alone cannot detect. If research seeks to underline the multiplicity of forms of militancy, it is thus better to select a sample in which the diverse components of a social movement are represented. The main “types”—social groups, generations, gender, political affiliations, and forms of participation in the social movements should be represented in the sample. Focusing on women, for example, Blee (2003) looked for diversity in terms of racist organizations, geographic coverage, age, and hierarchical position.

Other specific choices, calibrated in relation to the objectives of the research, regard the position of those interviewed in a certain institution. In research on social movements, for example, the temptation to speak mostly to leaders—more visible and able to attract greater curiosity—can be risky. In fact, life histories, like other in-depth interviews, are said to “allow scholars access to broader segments of social movement participants than are represented in documents and propaganda produced by movement leaders” (Blee 2013, 603). A good research strategy must not ignore rank-and-file militants for at least two reasons. First, they represent the largest population in numerical terms; second, since they are less exposed to role pressures, they tend to provide more honest accounts of their own private lives and the functioning of foundation structures. Naturally, interviews with leaders can be privileged in some cases; for example, when we wish to gather information that only leaders know on the national structure of the organization, or, again, if we are specifically interested in the motivations behind forms of “full-time” militancy, or in the processes of conversion into political professionals.

As in other types of qualitative interviews, recruitment can be carried out through known people, each interviewee can be asked for a list of contacts (snowballing), or the population of interest can be contacted directly by publishing advertisements or visiting places where the people to be interviewed gather.

Life histories should be then collected until a “saturation of knowledge” occurs; that is, when it is felt that new interviews would add nothing to the knowledge already acquired (Bertaux 1981). Research with life histories cannot aim at statistical representativeness. As with other qualitative techniques, it is weak in testing hypotheses or building statistics, but instead very rich for

more in-depth explanatory accounts, something that quantitative techniques have difficulties in providing. While, as mentioned, some research projects focused on one or two life histories and others (usually collaborative ones) collected hundreds, studies focusing on life histories usually report on 20 to 30 individual cases.

As far as sampling techniques are concerned, snowballing—that is requesting new potential contacts from people already interviewed—permits trust to be built from one interviewee to the next; it also helps in finding interviewees and in managing the interviews. In her research on racist women in the United States, Blee (2003, 200) explains that personal referrals and contacts were needed to “break through layers of evasion, reception, and political and personal posturing.” Protest events and group meetings are good places to contact activists. Snowballing is all the more important in research on social movement organizations that are small and/or secretive. The situation varies, however, according to the networks of personal relations in which the interviewer is inserted. For example, if the researcher has political sympathy for the movement they want to analyze, it will probably be easier to find channels of access to the groups with, however, the attendant risks of over-identification. If instead the researcher declares that they adhere to an opposing ideology, they risk being regarded with suspicion and hostility.

In my research on militants in clandestine organizations, I faced peculiar problems related to choosing interviewees. As the phenomenon of militancy applies to a small number of people only, any random sampling based on general population lists would be uneconomical. Given the prevalence of rather unstructured organizational models, up-to-date lists of militants in various groups that could be used for a random draw of interviewees were also missing. Most of the people I interviewed were in prison, and I expected them to be mistrustful of sociological research. This pushed me to start with some militants I had had some previous contact with, and ask them then for additional contacts with those they expected were available to be interviewed. I contacted potential partners mainly by writing letters to their prison address. My requests were initially generic as I aimed to interview a differentiated range of individuals and was interested in enlarging the contact lists. Later on, I asked for more specific types of partners, as I aimed to fill some gaps. In general, I wanted to cover different types of militants by age, gender, geographical belonging, groups participated in, and functions in the group.

When using life histories, it is important to take particular care over initial contacts. As already suggested for participant observation, “It is best to tell the truth about your research intentions, as early as practical and fair” (Lichterman 2002, 125). At the moment of contacting interviewees it is often important to communicate to them some basic information about the research itself, as well as the procedures of the interview. The extent to which

the research theme is laid bare should, however, be pondered carefully so as to avoid influencing the interview partners.

The following information is usually contained in a letter or statement to give to the interviewees:

- who you are;
- which institution you belong to;
- who your research's sponsor/s are;
- what the aim of the interview is;
- what the scope of the interview is;
- what the expected length of the interview is;
- how you selected interviewees;
- degree of anonymity ensured;
- rewards for the interviewee (symbolic, materials, etc.)

By way of illustration, I reproduce here my own letter to potential interviewees for the research on political violence in Italy, where the aims of the research were presented as follows:

Dear XY,

I am working on a research project on political violence for the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo. Some information on the characteristics and objectives of the research may be found in the enclosed letter from the president of the Institute. My participation in this project derives from my long-standing interest in the study of social movements and, in particular, in their evolution in relation to different types of responses they receive from the political and institutional system. I have taken up the opportunity offered by the Istituto Cattaneo because it seems to me that the story of clandestine organisations in Italy can also be analysed as a reaction by some components of a protest movement to obstacles met with in their environment. As often happens in the study of these phenomena, the most readily available sources are written ones, such as daily newspapers and official statistics. Yet information obtained from such sources is unquestionably partial and generally produces distorted reconstructions of events. The conviction that the analysis of forms of protest cannot be achieved without the contributions of actors that were its protagonists has thus taken hold among those scholars most attentive to the objectives of movements.

I am convinced that the same holds for the study of political violence in Italy. The "official" analyses and interpretations of the events of the last decade have often been incomplete or partial because no voice was given to those who, for better or worse, were personally involved in those events. I therefore ask you—and others that then supported the need for armed struggle—to help those who, albeit as more external spectators, remain involved through their need to understand the roots and reasons for those events by giving your testimony.

In the enclosed letter from Prof. x you will find some conditions that I hope give you sufficient guarantees of privacy should you accept our proposal. If you do wish to

help us, I would ask you to contact me at the Istituto Cattaneo to agree the time and manner of our meeting. I remain at your disposal for any further questions that the brevity of this letter may have left open.

In the enclosed letter, guarantees of anonymity and the exclusively scientific use of the interviews were offered, along with information on the sources of the project finances. A passage of it read: “a programme of study and research financed by the Emilia-Romagna Regional Government on the theme of political violence in Italy is currently underway at the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo. Within that research the reconstruction of a series of biographical paths that led to determined political and life choices during the 1970s is envisaged.”

Ethical issues are particularly relevant for research based upon life histories. One needs in fact to consider that “The respondent in a qualitative interview is subject to several risks. Participation in qualitative interviews can be time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding” (Silverman 2000, 27).

Conducting Life History Interviews

In general, the dynamics of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee are particularly delicate in qualitative interviews, as the good result of an interview depends in large part on the flux of communication between the two. As Blee summarizes, “The dynamics of rapport can be particularly complicated. When researchers remain distant and emotionally guarded, activists might be reluctant to provide rich information about themselves and their movements. Yet, researchers who become too closely identified with the interviewees may find it difficult to evaluate the taken for granted assumptions by which they operate” (2013, 604).

Interactions are even more delicate in life histories. As it has been observed, “Life histories, taken as constructs, are inseparable from the interactional process; they themselves evolve out of the genetic process of interaction, just as their presentation of the biographical research interview is a product of the interaction between narrator and listener” (Rosenthal 1993, 65). In order to keep potential distortion under control, it is important to reflect about the degree of involvement that the researcher wants to show about the topic. In all cases, the researcher has to avoid hijacking the interview by talking too much or being directive (see also della Porta 2014 on in-depth interviews).

We can add that social movement activists have characteristic potential “distortions” in their narrative, such as the presence of uncommon oratorical skills. Moreover, they are characterized by a strong tendency to look for justifications for their behavior that are in line with their political and ideological

beliefs, and to link their own individual choices to a historical—class or generational—destiny. As a consequence, interviewees often avoid describing their private life, and concentrate instead on the social characteristics of the environment and their political biography. One should, therefore, stress once again that life histories are better suited for recounting an activist's perception than reality itself.

Of course, choices have to be tailored to the types of movement one is studying, as well as the researcher's attitude towards it. As social movement scholars tend to be sympathetic to some movements and not to others, they tend naturally to be more open in expressing their sympathies when collecting life histories of left-libertarian and non-violent movements than when they work with right-wing and/or violent ones. While expressing one's own sympathy for the general ideas of a movement can help relax the atmosphere, over-identification risks reducing the very willingness of the interviewee to deliver information. A tendency to conform, from both sides, could make the conversation less lively. On the other side, when interviewing activists of a movement, or movement organization, one does not feel sympathetic to, there is often an instinct to differentiate oneself from the idea expressed by the interviewee, and then continue the conversation in a hostile tone. The aim of being "distant but not neutral" (Blee 1998, 385) is not always easy to implement.

These different attitudes (and related risks) were evident in the research on members of the underground organizations in Italy, in which we covered both left-wing and right-wing groups. In one of the first de-briefing meetings, listening in a group to a recorded interview with a right-wing radical, we noted in how many ways—and often vehemently—the interviewer had intervened to rebuff the interviewee, on his words and deeds. Often, hostile interactions had followed. Vice-versa, many members of the team, even if none had been involved in violent actions, confessed the impression they often shared that the lives of the left-wing militants they interviewed had many points of overlapping with their own and that this often created strong empathy. This impression I felt particularly strongly when interviewing (exceptionally, outside of prison) an activist of a left-wing clandestine organization born in the same year as myself, and whose first experiences of political participation had been at the same protest event that represented my own baptism into political participation, and who had initially joined a social movement organization I had also joined in more or less the same period. Even if his own political path into activism had developed in Milan, and mine in Sicily, there was nevertheless a strong and reciprocal feeling of proximity that permeated the whole interview.

I might add that the life histories I collected in prison were particularly intense from the emotional point of view. Sharing the same small space in the room assigned to the colloquium, being subject to the same constraints

(such as having to ask prison police to start a complicated procedure whenever one of us had to go to the toilet) tended to produce an immediate feeling of solidarity. In addition, I soon realized that, by breaking the dull everyday routine and offering the rare availability of a non-judgmental listener, our colloquiums were also emotionally intense for the interviewees, who often told me that they had started to psychologically prepare themselves for it long before our meeting. After these short but intense moments of sharing, I always found the moment of ending the interview particularly difficult—and the sensation I had when I knew that I could leave the prison, while they could not, frustrating.

The atmosphere of a total institution also had a clear effect on the tone and content of the life histories I collected. The experience of prison tended not only to represent a clear turning point, but also to influence a reading of the past as heavy and grey. I noted this especially when, after I had interviewed a woman who had been a member of a clandestine group in prison, she called me to tell me that she had been released, and invited me for lunch. Even though suffering remained in her narration, the story she told me there—outside of prison—was lighter and more nuanced than the one I had listened to before.

A summary of this advice about fieldwork is presented in Table 11.3. In sum, the dynamics of a life history interview tend to be strongly influenced on the side of the interviewee by what Pierre Bourdieu (1999, 370) defined as “the strong desire to be listened to and, for once, to be heard,” a pleasure derived from “having someone to talk to.” On the side of the interviewer, a good interaction implies “respect accorded to the other and the will to learn from others’ lives” (Auyero 2003, 197). The dialogue is an occasion to “recreate the joy . . . the thrill of being together,” but also “an opportunity to contest an official interpretation, to make one’s own point of view known” (Auyero 2003, 199).

Table 11.3 Entering the Field

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- Role of previous information: learn from documents
 - Role of informants—important basic knowledge but risk of identification with one part
 - Personal style
 - the various dilemma: open versus reserved but also:
 - exploit what you have/are
 - Approach:
 - interested but not committed
 - knowledgeable but do not show off
 - Ethical issues:
 - no open lie/no excessive discovery
 - do not push for sensitive/dangerous/personal information that is not needed for the research
 - protect anonymity (also: names tend to personalize an account)
-

The Analysis

Analysis of life histories differs according to whether attention focuses on the modes of functioning of memory, or on the information an individual is able to offer.

Individuals are said to be the worst narrators of the events in which they have been involved, in so far as they have a direct interest in them. Literary ambitions or economic interests are seen as incentives to make one's own life more dramatic (Faris 1980). Psychological mechanisms push towards a linear reconstruction of one's own life around some main narrative themes. A "desire for immortality" (Horowitz 1977) leads us to avoid reporting on the most banal or embarrassing aspect of our biography, and stress instead its virtues. Memory and individual understanding imply acts of imagination just as creative as art. In life histories, the truth is often manipulated through narrative ability expressed in healthy doses of drama and escapism. Memory in general tends to forget, confound, lie.

Oral historians have successfully defended life histories against this criticism. They have observed that written sources reveal a similar degree of unreliability. For instance, official statistics have also been proved to be biased: so much so that statistics on criminality often tell us more about judicial organizations and the police than about crime (Becker 1970). Selectivity in the reporting of information has been as commonplace in the more traditional branches of the social sciences.

On the one hand, scholars have employed different devices in order to increase the reliability of the information collected through life histories, for instance, by discussing the internal incongruities of the narration with the interviewees themselves; comparing different biographies with each other (Poirer and Clapier-Vailadon 1980); using an inter-disciplinary approach in order to separate the "real" from the interpretation (Grele 1975); applying communication theory to the life histories in order to control the interactions between interviewee and interviewer (Clark et al. 1980); checking the dates from interviews with those from other sources, such as mass media accounts, movement documents, interviews with experts, police statistics, and trial records.

On the other hand, distortions can become the focus of the analysis, where the aim is singling out some systematic evolution in the description of reality. As Luisa Passerini notes, "all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in what sense, where, for what purpose" (1989, 197). Oral historians recognized, in fact, that life histories are always influenced by collective clichés and individual preferences which determine the interviewee's selection of recollections and information. Narrative tends to satisfy prevalent cultural myths. With skills including knowledge on the biochemical composition of the human brain, they have listed the distortions produced

by age—that is, the neurophysiological tendency to forget recent events more quickly than older ones; and psychological distortions, such as the gradual disappearance of more radical attitudes (Lumms 1981). Some oral historians have pointed at differences in individual reactions, such as the appearance of cyclical movement or of sharp divisions between “now” and “then,” present and past, of an unlucky life or a successful one. Others have pointed at the optimism concerning successful evolution or the pessimism concerning a static reality (Grele 1979; Gagnon 1980). The reaction to all these limitations in terms of source reliability is to place the form of the interview at the center of the investigation: “The question is not directed at the facts, but at the nature of individual memory and historical conscience” (Faris 1980, 172). Research should not therefore be oriented to checking the reliability of the source, but rather to revealing the broad lines along which human memory is organized (Passerini 1981).

Psychological and cultural myths, or the ideologies that structure individual conscience are sought in life histories. Life histories are re-read to trace similar models of reference to the past: the cyclical following on or the clear separation between then and now; positivist evolution or a pessimistic view of an unchangeable reality. The researcher seeks to single out the modalities through which individuals reconstruct their pasts in light of present convictions (Renza 1977), or of the literary model dominating at the moment they write (Meyer Spacks 1977). Research has analyzed the form of the text, considering it important for understanding content (Burgos 1979). Different justification strategies have been detected according to whether in its information selection a subject has tended to defend, for example, the image of an unfortunate existence, or that of the irresistible succession of events.

Much energy has, in addition, been dedicated to identifying the functioning of memories and their structure. The study of mentality has allowed us to understand shifts in dates, the invention of non-existent events, and the complete omission of public and private facts, not as malfunctions in memory, but as strategies of the imagination that serve to protect some ideals. Silences on entire historical periods have been interpreted as tools for shielding myths behind a reality of daily compromise (Passerini 1980). The study of psychological mechanisms and cognitive dynamics has been deepened through investigations of collective imagination. Narration in life histories has been studied as a technique for reconstructing a “restructured” self-image, looking at the way in which the individual represents specific aspects of the past that are relevant in guiding present actions (Kohli 1981, 65). The study of life histories thus becomes a way of comparing individual processes of the formation of identity, defined as a symbolic structure that guarantees continuity and consistency through changing biographical states and different social positions. There is, however, the risk of concentrating all attention on

the uniqueness of individual paths, overlooking the similarities produced by common generational events and historical experiences.

In an (intermediate) version, life histories are considered particularly useful for shedding light on events of public concern in which those interviewed were personally involved and, especially, those aspects where their individual experience was most direct. The focus of the analysis here becomes the way in which the story transforms within the individual conscience, how public events interfere in private life, and how the perception of the external world induces or blocks active behaviors. The profound effects of social changes are sought at the level of individual experience, in the definition of a subjective dimension of social reality as a way in which individuals represent the conditions of their own existence to themselves (Gagnon 1980). The intersection between biographical time and historical time explains the influence of social transformations and the individual cycle of life on the concrete way in which a story develops (Balan and Jelin 1980).

Certainly, a concern with life history interviews is the high degree of subjectivity involved in the interpretation and presentation of results. In summarizing specific biographies, for instance, one may tend to omit a good 90 percent of the text of the interviews. The question here is then, how can other scholars be sure that the parts I reported do not contradict parts of the interview that were not presented? Two radical solutions have been suggested in order to ensure an accurate interpretation: either analyzing the life histories with the help of quantitative methods, or publishing the interviews as they are recorded. Both seem, however, too radical. As for the first, quantitative analysis is likely to reduce the complexity of a life history, fragmenting bits and pieces of biographical data which make sense only as a whole. As for the second, although a few oral historians have stressed the necessary fidelity to the oral text, and proposed that it should be reproduced with only a few formal corrections (Faraday and Plummer 1979), many others convincingly showed the lack of scientific interest of the publication of high-fidelity transcriptions without comment or interpretation (Burgos 1979; Gagnon 1980).

On this point, oral historians have developed technical devices for increasing the fidelity of the transcription with respect to the oral one, such as the complete and immediate transcriptions of interviews (Bertaux 1980), the compilation of pre-printed cards on the material (Thompson 1978), and translation from the oral to the written language (Chevalier 1979). The risk of being too subjective can be reduced when more than one researcher participates in a project. Moreover, as is the case at least for the three larger research projects on activists—the oral history of 1968, the research of the Carlo Cattaneo Institute, and the seminar in the Turin prison—the tape-recorded or transcribed interviews can be deposited in archives and made available to the general scientific community.

A certain degree of subjectivity seems unavoidable, however, as it does with other qualitative methods. From my own experience, one should expect about 100 pages of text in the transcription of an average-length life history. As we have already seen, up to 50 life histories are collected in a medium-sized project (and more than that in the oral history of 1968). The simple reading of thousands of pages requires an enormous amount of time. Presentation thus implies a drastic selection of material. No technical device can solve the problem. However, the presence of research hypotheses and a good background knowledge of the social movement to which the activists belong help in selecting the relevant material in successive readings of the transcriptions.

In my experience with the life histories of Italian activists, I found it helpful to write different kinds of summaries for each life history, such as a chronology of the life course, a brief semi-codified scheme with the key variable, and a synthesis of the main themes mentioned in the narration. These summaries help in the selection of materials, in so far as they allow one to control the shape of the life course, how widespread an experience is, and which quotations can best exemplify themes which are common to different life-histories. Interviews are thus “restructured,” following a chronological or a thematic model.

In the analysis of the rich material from the life histories of militants of underground organizations I alternated two different strategies. One was to summarize some specific moments in a life history, in order to illustrate especially dynamic processes. For instance, in my book *Clandestine Political Violence* (della Porta 2013), I used this reconstruction to open a chapter on paths of recruitment in the underground:

Antonio Savasta was born in 1956 in Rome. His father was a police officer, his mother a housewife of working class origins. Although his mother’s family was of the left-wing tradition and his grandfather a socialist who had refused to become a member of the Fascist Nationalist Party, politics was not discussed at home—as his father was of the opinion that “politics is dirty” (Life history no. 27, 416). Politics did not in fact play a role in his first socialization. At sixteen, Savasta had “a limited experience of life, a limited consciousness of life, but a great taste for rebellion” (Life history no. 27, 409). In fact, his very first (and superficial) contact with politics, while still at primary school, was with an extreme right group, Europa e Civiltà, with whom he practiced sport and went leafleting (Life history no. 27, 421). Moving into a “red” neighborhood, Centocelle, he began to get involved in left-wing politics. This was mainly a result of his participation in the youth subculture of the time:

I’m very interested in music, have long hair, and friends in the libertarian world of the hippies. . . . Obviously, the sense of freedom, liberation, and rebellion were couched in pacifist terms. . . . Vis-a-vis the traditional world and culture there was also a direct clash on issues such as drugs. . . . Drugs, hashish, marijuana was liberation, feeling good, overcoming an oppressive normality. (Life history no. 27, 423)

He defined himself as an anarchist, like his brother: “young, long hair, hippy, libertarian, for free love and free drugs” (Life history no. 27, 424).

His political commitment increased with the occupation of his school, and directly in the extra-parliamentary New Left, as he perceived the PCI as “another world”: “because the way I was at that time, the long hair, the drugs, even if light drugs, hashish.” Therefore, Savasta recalls that when his activism started “it had nothing to do with the Italian Communist Party, the FGCI. I felt closer instead to Potere Operaio, Lotta continua, because they dressed like us, they talked about the same things, we met at the same concerts, they were much more determined” (Life history no. 27, 424).

In the radicalized context of the early 1970s, politics involved in fact an immediate experience of violence in the street battles with radical right activists. Savasta recalls that, in his neighborhood, “there was this thing of anti-fascism, very strong” (Life history no. 27). He writes of being “punched by these people, just because I had long hair” and of having identified them as those who wanted to negate freedom, not only politically but also culturally. In 1972, he was a member of the militant organization Potere Operaio, and had to change his external appearance:

for the first time, I had to wear different clothes. Before, I went around with the Eskimo and with long hair, I went to the assemblies with leather jackets à la Elvis Presley, long hair and shoes with high heels, tight jeans. Instead, I was told to wear good clothes, in order to avoid being stopped and searched. (Life history no. 27, 428)

In Potere Operaio, he started justifying violence as “an active defense against the fascists. . . . those were the days of hunting the fascists. The marches started to be self-defended against the fascists. The first arm is the stick, which you could transform into a red flag” (Life history no. 27, 426). Violence was also justified by the international symbols and myths of Che Guevara and the Vietcong, as well as by state repression. But first of all violence was experienced through intense emotions: “I was in the fifth row of the marshal body that was facing the police, with a terrible fear . . . I saw the first Molotovs being thrown . . . there was the fight . . . and then we ran with the police behind us” (Life history no. 27, 427). In various parts of the interview, Savasta insists on the “big emotional charge, the desire for change, against the widespread moral,” of the “intensity of the relationship, in the sense that we talked really about everything.”

In this emotionally charged atmosphere, radicalization happened around a symbolic, occupied territory: the squatted houses in San Basilio, where a young activist was killed by a policeman in September 1974. This served not only as the symbol of a struggle “for one’s own needs,” but also as the arena of daily conflicts with the police and the marshal body of the PCI. He presents it as a dramatic experience:

Three days of conflict with the police; I went out in the morning, went to fight, came back home to eat, went back in the afternoons, until the evenings. It was a sort of Londonderry, a battle made of Molotov cocktails and stones to conquer five metres of land, ten metres at the crossing . . . all ’till a boy from the Collettivo dei Castelli was killed, and they killed him in front of me, while we were attacking a police post. The policeman was shooting, and this boy died, and I took it very badly, very badly. I came back from these fights in the evening and then, at night, there was this incredible shoot-out because . . . we all came back, armed, and fought with the wrath of God, that is armed fights with the police, in fact there were policemen hurt by bullets. (Life history no. 27, 434)

The events gave new strength to the ongoing debate on the organization of violence and mass mobilization, a debate which, according to Savasta, involved a large number of activists: “when we took to the streets we had three or four hundred people, only with the Comitato comunista Centocelle; it was a big reality, that involved especially school kids, and some neighborhood kids, and discussed violence in extremely normal terms. So, until ‘76 I was involved in this type of discussion” (Life history no. 27, 435). In fact, criticism of the Red Brigades was especially linked to their clandestinity and therefore their distance from the social struggles, more than for their use of violent forms of action.

With the concrete failure of the attempt to combine armed struggle and mass mobilization, however, his fascination with the Red Brigades increased “because the Red Brigades, nobody knows what they are, one thinks it is an extremely compact organization” (Life history no. 27, 444). A small network of former Centocelle militants (amongst them Savasta’s girlfriend, Emilia Libera) entered into contact with the BR through a fellow activist: “it stays in the family, it’s all in the family, we talked with someone we had known since 1972” (Life history no. 27, 446). After their recruitment, they formed a Centocelle brigade that continued to intervene in the neighborhood, although no longer to stimulate “mass struggles,” but rather to “recruit a series of vanguard people in that situation” (Life history no. 27, 449).

The choice for the armed struggle thus emerges as a natural consequence of the involvement in a radicalized community: “It is useless to joke, that it was possible to do other things, given the way in which things were, given the roles, the function of the parties and the function of the society. In those years, in that situation it was unavoidable for some people, a few or many as they were—it may be they were not so few after all—to take that route” (Life history no. 27, 447). When he eventually entered the BR in 1976, he thought that “the things we were doing were going to blossom in a true insurrection, or at least open guerrilla warfare” (Life history no. 27, 448).

In the same chapter, I then used excerpts from various other life histories in order to show, on the one hand, the commonalities in the recruitment path, but on the other to single out differences between some specific paths. So, for instance, I argued that:

The life histories of the Italian militants of the second generation resemble that of Savasta, even though they more often ended up in one of the many clandestine groups founded in the second half of the 1970s, rather than in the BR. These militants had less (or less visible) continuity with a family history of left-wing activism, and in fact their encounters with politics happened later and in a less linear way than for those in the previous paths. Political violence was legitimized less by reference to ideology or political strategies than by the identification with radicalized activist milieus. Experiences with political violence often pre-dated the entrance into the armed organization, developing in a radicalized environment through street battles with neo-fascists and police.

The community to be defended was the counterculture of the radical Left in which political and friendship ties overlapped. Peer pressure did stem from a milieu in which violence was accepted as a given. Militants there “have consumed the final phase of the groups and are more determined than those who were 18 years old in ‘68, who had a slower and more classical process of acquisition of a political culture, much more inherited from the traditional left, even if in a critical way, these are instead strange types, very peculiar . . . an incredible difference” (Life history no. 29, 28–9).

The context in which this path spread was the product of the escalation of political fights, in which individuals were involved at a very young age. In the words of a militant, “the choice is there but it is not the choice as the people imagine the terrorist at the end of the 1970s, with the clandestine organization that challenges the state. The organization was inside the struggle, the aim was therefore not armed struggle per se, but to solicit a further step of determination or toughness in the social struggle . . . until the Moro kidnapping I had no impression of political isolation” (Life history no. 29, 341).

Radicalization was, if not triggered, at least strengthened by the pre-existence of an armed conflict. At the meso-level, these types of activists often introduced some organizational and ideological innovations, as they tended to be not only younger, but also less disciplined and less loyal to the ideological orthodoxy. While their political socialization was not rooted in the family and therefore happened later, their mobilization toward the armed struggle was quicker than in the other paths.

Socialization to violent politics acquired in fact a particular relevance for a second generation of activists that either joined the BR later or founded other underground organizations. One of the Italian left-wing militants of this second generation recalled the speed of his radicalization: “My first march was on October 1, 1977; in February 1978, I joined an autonomous collective; in April-May of that very year, I was already supporting [the terrorist group] Front Line” (left-wing radical, in Novelli and Tranfaglia 1988, 300).

Acceptance for violence tended to increase among social movement activists. As a first generation left-winger described this difference: “All of us who had been politically active before, had a lot of difficulty with respect to the military action, to the very fact of carrying arms. . . . Those who had no prejudice at all were the younger ones, those who were 18 or 19 years old” (Life history no. 5, 65). A militant of the first generation, thus described his uneasiness with the growing availability of young activists towards violence. He recalled in fact that he had participated in several radical groups, but often quit, as he thought they were too extreme. He exited a first group after they started to organize robberies. Of another, he said that he wanted “to do a work, also military yes, but linked to the masses . . . but they started to make discourses more and more militaristic, and I again quit” (Life history no. 16, 201). In a third one, he was suspended after he opposed a plan for a kidnapping. Then, “1977 explodes and I call the boys and say, well, when there are the mass, we go and with the mass movements . . . and we went, but I tried to calm them down, because there were these very young proletarians, they came with us. But after the first march, as they wanted to break everything, I said no, we break nothing here, we break only what needs to be broken, they have broken already even too much” (Life history no. 16, 204).

Auyero observed about his own work that, “those accounts will, I hope, help us to get as close as possible to the diverse experiences of the uprising, to the ways in which picketers and rioters make sense of their action and of themselves, knowing, however, that there is a perpetual tension between the experience at the time and the memories told to the analyst years after the events” (2003, 12). In my own research too, life histories provided extremely rich sources of this process of sense making and social construction, even if they also showed a tension between experiences and memories.

This richness of details is usually reflected in a reporting style that emphasizes dense narratives, usually in book-length works. As new technologies allow us to more easily combine tape-recording and video-recording, the analysis through written text can now be more easily accompanied by visual production.

Conclusion: When to Use Life Histories and When Not

Life histories should be handled carefully in organizational studies and in the reconstruction of historical events. As for the collection of information on political organizations and social movements, documents and in-depth interviews offer more advantages than life histories. The former are in fact much less time consuming than the latter. As a general rule, the more oriented towards public events a research project is, the less useful the life-history technique. Moreover, when the aim is to collect information about organizational processes, participant observation is a more adequate technique. However, participant observation is possible in organizations which are open to the external environment, and which will accept the presence of a social scientist. Conversely, the more underground a social movement organization is, the more information collected through life-history techniques can be useful in understanding organizational dynamics.

Life histories are also particularly suitable for research on the symbolic dimensions of social movements. In this area, they allow for a different kind of knowledge to be produced than that provided by other techniques. Opinion polls, for instance, can offer reliable and quantifiable information on the perceptions and value orientations of activists. However, they do not allow us to trace the processes by which attitudes are transformed into action and by which rationales for action are created. Content analysis can provide a detailed description of ideologies, but cannot tell us about how these are filtered into the everyday life of the activist. An experimental research design concentrates on the analysis of the movement identity, telling us much less about the internalization of movement identities in individual consciousness. Finally, network analyses can single out nodes and ties, but has less to say about the affective and cognitive mechanisms that make them effective.

In comparison with these techniques, life histories produce better knowledge concerning phenomena which lie at the margins between private and public, real and imaginary, subjective and objective. They permit understandings, not only of individual psychology, but also group phenomena; not only of movement ideology, but also movement counterculture; not only of organizational

stories, but also of the dynamics of small networks. Where other techniques offer static images, life histories are better suited to describe processes. The advantages of life histories as compared with other techniques seem therefore greater in research which aims at understanding the construction of individual perceptions and investigating the private, everyday life of activists.

For a variety of reasons, both the subjective dimension and the private sphere are more important for understanding the motivation to participate in social movements than other forms of political behavior. The cultural dimension is very important here, as social movement organizations are poor in material incentives and rely instead upon a large variety of symbolic incentives. Participation in a movement produces a collective identity, which is then enforced through individual integration in a movement counterculture made up of alternative value systems and social structures. Integration into this counterculture strongly influences the “lens” through which reality is perceived, information is selected, and motivation produced. The more a social movement organization is embedded in a counter-culture, the more life histories offer useful knowledge for the understanding of activists’ motivations.

It should be kept in mind, however, that this is by no means a time-saving or easy-to-use technique. The collection, transcription, and interpretation of the interviews require many more material resources (time and money) than one would expect. Moreover, concepts and theories are needed in order to avoid the potential problem that “through these ‘stories’ life appears to be deprived of relations and structures and appears similar to a chaotic magma” (Gallino 1962, 68).

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12 Focus Groups

Donatella della Porta

Focus groups are discussions within a small group, moderated by a researcher, and oriented to obtain information on a specific topic (Blee and Taylor 2002, 107). They have been defined as “a revelation technique for social research, based on discussion in a small group of people, in the presence of one or more moderators, focused on an argument to be investigated in depth” (Corrao 2000). A moderator facilitates the discussion by presenting the main focus of the research, and then stimulating the debate, trying to involve all participants and discuss central topics.

A distinction between focus groups and group interviews has been made on the basis of the structuring of the debate during the interview. Thus, “In group interviews, the group is asked a sequence of predetermined questions. . . . In focus groups, predetermined questions may also be asked, but the objective is not primarily to elicit the group’s answers but rather to stimulate discussion and thereby understand . . . the meanings and norms which underlie those group answers” (Bloor et al. 2001, 43). In practice, however, the two terms tend to be used interchangeably, as they are in this chapter.

The technique was developed by Paul Lazarsfeld at the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Research in the 1940s. Another scholar at Columbia, Robert Merton, published an article on what he called “focused interviews” in 1946 in the *American Journal of Sociology*, codifying procedures for group interviews (Merton and Kendall 1946). For a long time from the 1950s onwards, the focus group was prevalently used in applied research (especially for commercial or electoral purposes), or as an auxiliary instrument in order to test questions for surveys or interpret survey results. Since the 1990s, focus groups have re-emerged in qualitative social sciences (often triangulated with surveys). Indeed, in recent years focus groups, like other qualitative techniques, have been rediscovered and revisited. Their use has grown rapidly in the social sciences, driven by various elements: from cuts in budgets, which discouraged the use of more expansive techniques of data collection, to an anti-quantitative turn in the social sciences and the development of evaluation research (Morgan 2001). In the United States in the 1990s, about 1,000 focus group management professionals were practicing, each conducting about 100 groups per year (Bloor et al. 2001, 3). Similar to focus groups, deliberative polls have been proposed as a technique to analyze attitudinal changes produced by high-quality discussions (Fishkin 2003). If

in some research projects they are used as the main technique for empirical analysis, in others they are employed as a way to facilitate participation by the public during research, or to carry out some type of member validation at the end of a project.

Differently from in-depth interviews, in focus groups participants do not have to respond individually to a series of questions formulated by the researcher, but are instead called on to discuss and confront each other collectively—as a group—on the theme that forms the object of the investigation. As has been observed, “The data that focus group discussions produce are distinct in a number of ways from data collected by other qualitative methods . . . the aim of the focus group is to initiate discussion between group members, and it is this interaction that make the data distinct” (Bloor et al. 2001, 58).

In short, we can define a focus group as a loosely structured conversation conducted with a group of interviewees that, through a focused debate upon certain topics, aims at investigating collective opinions.

These characteristics of focus groups are reflected in some of their prerogatives (Del Giorgio 2002). Based on a modality of discussion among equals, focus groups allow us to recreate—almost as in an experiment—conditions similar to those considered as belonging to normal paths of opinion formation. A focus on interactions allows the researcher to observe transformations of individual opinions, but also their integration within a more collective vision.

In what follows, I discuss the different methodological challenges confronted when using focus groups, starting from theorization and moving to the preparation of the outline, the selection of participants, the conducting of the interview, and the analysis of the transcription. I refer throughout to my own experience with this method in research on democracy in the global justice movement. The project included six focus groups with activists of the Florence Social Forum; these were triangulated with participant observation, a survey, and in-depth interviews, as well as a content analysis of social movement organizations’ statutes (for more information, see della Porta 2005).

Theories and Conceptualization

Focus groups aim to discover the meaning behind the position of a certain group, and the collective process through which this collective meaning is formed. Indeed, this method has been defined as “the best way for accessing group norms” (Bloor et al. 2001, 6), allowing us “to articulate normally not-articulated normative assumptions” (Bloor et al. 2001). Presenting particular

advantages for researchers with special interest in the norms that are at the basis of some groups' behavior and their construction of meaning, it "can yield data on the meanings that lie behind those group assessments," as well as group processes (Bloor et al. 2001, 4).

Focus groups enable the researcher to observe the collective framing of an issue. As participants in the debates share and compare information and opinions (Morgan 1997), discussions among members help to discover the collective norms and meanings. Where quantitative data from opinion polls show the presence and spread of some opinions and/or behaviors, focus groups allow for the investigation of the reasons for and the meanings given to some behaviors. They represent "an ideal strategy to explore social construction processes" (Johnston 2002, 83)—especially useful for collecting information about specific subgroups of the population and on issues that are of interest to them.

Focus groups also permit observation on various cultural phenomena. Like other qualitative techniques, they appear as particularly useful for analyzing cultural themes, especially among those groups that are normally without a voice. In the focus group, the indigenous terms of everyday language are rediscovered. In addition, they can be used to collect preliminary information on emerging and/or little studied phenomena. In fact, "in contrast to individual interviews, they allow the researchers to observe the group interactions that underlie the construction of collective identity, collective action frames, and the emotional dynamics involved in the creation of oppositional values" (Blee and Taylor 2002, 109). Discussions among members help in discovering the collective norms and meanings. So, focus groups, "in principle and with a fair wind, can provide the occasion and the stimulus for collective members to articulate those normally nonarticulated normative assumptions" (Bloor et al. 2001, 5).

In social movement studies, group interviews—interviews involving a small number of activists requested to address some specific questions—can be particularly useful in "capturing topics that unify and divide movement participants" (Blee 2013, 604). Although rarely used as the main methods of data gathering, they are increasingly employed as auxiliary instruments in research based on in-depth interviews and/or participant observation.

Group interviews were used in two large and influential research projects during the 1980s, both of which paid particular attention to the analysis of collective identities. The first was led by Alain Touraine on the student, anti-nuclear, regionalist, women's, and labor movements in France (see Touraine 1978); the second by Alberto Melucci (1989) on the ecological, women's, and youth movements in Milan, Italy. In both cases, the attention focused on the meaning-making processes in the movements. Touraine aimed at an in-depth analysis of the "I(dentity)-O(pposition)-T(otality)," that is, the fundamental self-understanding of the movement, or the highest meaning of its

action. As he defined it, the main aim of his sociological intervention was to enter into social relations with the social movements, going beyond their ideology. Melucci's research, "utilizing an experimental qualitative method, was designed to investigate the process of forming a collective actor" (1989, 236), with particular attention to the qualitative and affective dimension of individual experience.

In my own research on the social forums, arenas where hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals that belonged to the movement for global justice variously met (della Porta 2004; della Porta 2009a; Del Giorgio 2002), the focus was on the understanding of how democracy worked in the movements and the values that supported it. Focus groups appeared as particularly helpful for the analysis of the processes of construction of collective identities, especially where actors were varied and complex. They allowed me to analyze the way in which the organizational ideology of the global justice movement acquired meaning and normative strength, as well as how these norms and understanding were collectively constructed and shared.

In my research project, focus groups were particularly useful in reconstructing the collective vision of democracy within and outside the movement. In general, discussions on the concept of deliberative democracy have begun with normative theory, and only more recently and sporadically has empirical research been conducted on the topic. If the measurement of the quality and outcomes of communication processes in public institutions is certainly difficult, research on social movements presents some specific challenges: the lack of institutional places for deliberation (or their constant shifting), of (extensive and reliable) minutes of meetings, or of lists of members are among them.

In the pilot study on internal democratic practices in the global justice movement, with a particular focus on the social forums in Tuscany, I combined different methods:¹ a) discourse analysis of documents; b) participant observation; c) survey; d) in-depth interviews with activists; and e) focus groups. As for *discourse analysis*, the websites of the main umbrella organizations (<<http://www.attac.it>; <<http://www.disobbedienti.org>>; <<http://www.forisociali.org>>, etc.) were useful sources in order to map the local social forums (170 were catalogued in Italy in the spring of 2003) and their links. In the websites was information about the statutes of the organizations. These texts presented the organizational ideology: the organizational structure, the (formal) decisional procedures, division of labor, and so on.

We also *surveyed* participants of the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2004 and participants at the meetings of the social forums we attended. For well-known reasons, however, surveys are not the best way to analyze either concrete organizational praxis or organizational values (Dryzek 2004). Besides the difficulty of assessing the interviewee's feelings of obligation and attempts to provide "socially desirable answers or rationalization,"

surveys tend to produce superficial or very standardized responses: “feelings and emotions, people’s uncertainties, doubts, and fears, all the inconsistencies and the complexities of social interactions and belief systems are matters that are not easily rapped with survey questionnaires” (Klandermans and Smith 2002, 27). Some *participant observation*—in our research, we attended the general assemblies and other open meetings of six social forums (Florence, Prato, Arezzo, Lucca, Livorno, Pisa and Massa)—combined with *in-depth interviews* with activists allowed us to reconstruct democratic practices and their meanings. For a more in-depth knowledge of activists’ collective values and meanings, we relied upon *focus groups*. While serious criticism of organizational praxis had already emerged during the interviews, the focus groups formed the location where the self-reflexive capacity of the activists seemed more stimulated. In our research, attention focused therefore on the understanding of democracy in movements and the values that support this conception. Focus groups allowed us to analyze the way in which the organizational ideology of the new global movement acquired meaning and normative strength, as well as how these norms and understandings were collectively constructed and shared.

The Scheme: What to Ask

Focus groups are, as mentioned, discussions within a small group, moderated by a researcher, and oriented towards obtaining information on a specific topic (Blee and Taylor 2002, 107). The moderator facilitates the discussion by presenting the main focus of the research, and then stimulating the debate, involving all the participants and covering some main topics. As for in-depth interviews (see della Porta 2014), an outline of themes to be addressed is also normally prepared for focus groups too. A self-completed questionnaire generally serves to collect basic information about participants, including information on opinions.

If focus groups should be “focused” on some issues, the ways to obtain this “focusing” vary, however, as there exist a variety of more or less structured approaches (see Table 12.1). Many combinations are possible in relation to the role of the moderator, on a continuum that stretches from a “self-management” focus, where the moderator limits him- or herself to guaranteeing the correct functioning of the discussion without asking specific questions, to a highly structured focus, where the moderator poses questions following the formulation and the order indicated in an outline (Morgan 1988; Krueger 1994).

In the most structured versions, the objective is defined as collecting answers to questions posed by the researcher, and the latter’s interests are dominant. The agenda is thus constructed around a grid which contains a

Table 12.1 Focus Groups: More Structured Versus Less Structured Types

More structured	Less structured
Goals: answer researcher's questions	Understand participants' thinking
Researcher's interest dominant	Participants' interests dominant
Questions set the agenda	Questions guide discussion
Large number of (more) specific questions	Small number of more general questions
Specific amount of time for each question	Flexible allocation of time
Moderator directs discussion	Moderator facilitates interaction
Moderator refocuses off-topic remarks	Moderator can explore new directions
Participants address moderator	Participants talk to each other

Source: Morgan 2001, 147.

large number of very specific questions. The moderator directs the debate, checking timing so that each theme is addressed in its own allocated time slot. In the least structured versions, on the other hand, the objective is spaced around the comprehension of the participants' modes of thinking, and their interests are considered dominant. The questions—few and on general themes—are thought of as a guide for the conversation, and a flexible allocation of time is foreseen for the different themes. The moderator's function is prevalently that of facilitator of a mostly horizontal conversation who can push participants to explore new directions.

The ideal group would start with an opening question designed to capture the participants' interest, so that they would explore nearly all of the issues the moderator might have probed by themselves. Then, ideally “just as the allocated amount of time for a question was running out, one of the participants in the ideal group would spontaneously direct the others' attention to the topic for the second question by saying something like, ‘You know what really strikes me is how many of the things we are saying are connected to . . .’” (Morgan 2001, 148). While it is important that the moderator limits his or her interventions, and does not interrupt the flow of the conversation, it should, however, be borne in mind that less structured group interviews function above all when the participants are interested in the argument.

In preparing the outline, together with a—more or less structured—series of questions, one might use focusing exercises, which include ranking exercises, vignettes (e.g., unclear and problematic images that participants are asked to interpret), or the preparation of news bulletins (for instance, by distributing pictures or other visual materials).

In the research projects led by Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci the preparation of group interviews was an important step, entailing both the analysis of documents and contacts with potential partners (see Table 12.2). This culminated in a sort of contract between the researchers and the research participants. In addition, in both cases, different mediator figures were

Table 12.2 Group Interview Implementation in the Touraine and Melucci Projects

	Touraine	Melucci
Aims	I-O-T	Logic of action
Groups	Constructed/pluralist, rank and file, small size	One real group plus one area debate, small size
Duration	30 meetings of two to four hours each	8 meetings of three hours each
Preparation	Documents Partenaires Demand of intervention, contract	In-depth interviews, participant observation, contract
Researcher	Agitateur and secretary consultant	Self-experimentation
Stages of intervention	Group temoin Group de confrontation Group analiste	Who we are (memory, self-representation) Who are you (taped representation of allies and adversary)

present during the meetings, planned to involve a number of occasions. In the research on social movements in Milan, for example, a contract was prepared in advance: “It was important, however, that the research be presented as an open space in which the objectives of the researchers and actors could meet without coinciding” (Melucci 1989, 244). Informed commitment must also include the fixing of any topics to remain off-limits.

In our research on the social forums, the discussion in each group was always opened with the question “What is this movement according to you and for you?” Through this question it was possible to identify the most important characteristics immediately indicated by the subjects as belonging to the movement and gather, through single personal experiences, the type of relations and degrees of identification in the latter.

The debates then covered, in different orders, such topics as the organizational profiles of the movement, its network structure, the role of larger associations and political parties, the role of individuals and their “subjectivity”, strategic choices, common values, understandings of politics and democracy—with particular attention to the mechanisms, advantages, and problems of internal practices of democracy. In explaining the aim of our research, we insisted that the members of the groups did not have to feel they represented their own associations (and this was one of the reasons we excluded the leaders), but were instead invited to talk about their own individual experiences in the movement. They were asked to explain their opinions, not only about the actual implementation of principles such as consensual decisions and horizontal, equal, and transparent communication, but also about the potentialities and difficulties of democracy within movements. The perception of contexts was also important: both of government and potential allies among the parties, and the role and attitude of means of mass communication. During the group interview, as the accent was placed

on concrete experiences, perceived elements of force and concrete difficulties in the development of the forum formed other focuses.

These same themes were deepened following an outline, but also by seeking to connect to what emerged spontaneously from the words of the participants, and not precluding a priori the possibility of highlighting unforeseen but particularly relevant aspects.

Whom to Interview

Specific decisions regard the selection of participants in focus groups. Most important is the choice of the degree of internal homogeneity in the group. Many authors consider a certain level of cultural homogeneity as an important condition for favoring conversation (Morgan 1988; Krueger 1994). In fact, it has been noted that a preliminary commonality of interests and a balanced socio-cultural arrangement allow for a more fluid conversation. Some degree of homogeneity (as far as some socio-cultural characteristics are concerned) is also considered as a precondition for communication (Morgan 1988; Krueger 1994). The assumption is that “groups that are too heterogeneous might result in conflict and the repression of views of certain individuals” (Bloor et al. 2001, 20). At the same time, however, sufficient diversity among participants to encourage discussion is necessary.

A second, but related, issue refers to the choice between really existing versus constructed groups: scholars may in fact choose natural groups that pre-date the research itself, or ad hoc groups formed for the purposes of the research. In general, focus group experts suggest we work with artificially constructed groups, even with members who never met each other before, in order to avoid pre-existing strains disturbing the work of the group (Lazarsfeld 1967). Groups composed of strangers have the advantage that members will speak in a freer and more open manner without fear of repercussions on group life (Bloor et al. 2001, 24–5). Natural groups do, however, allow the analysis to be deepened, since they start with already constructed identities. The advantages of natural groups also include the possibility of bringing comments about shared experience and events into the discussion, and the chance to challenge discrepancies.

In the aforementioned research projects on social movements in France and Italy, while small groups met repeatedly over time in both, in Touraine’s research the groups were made up of activists from different areas of the movement, while in Melucci’s, existing groups were chosen, even if a meeting between representatives of the different groups was foreseen at the end of the research. Alain Touraine formed his groups so that they represented the main

areas within each movement. His choice of participants aimed at diversity, with the inclusion of all main components, taking care that members were “capable of leading inside the group the broader debates on the nature and the problems of the movement” (1978, 196). With this aim in mind, Touraine suggests we recruit rank-and-file members, rather than leaders, wherever possible. Additionally, he notes that two or more groups are necessary in order to avoid confusing local specificities with the general characteristics of the movement. Alberto Melucci decided to target his research on naturally existing groups, focusing on the grassroots level rather than on the more complex structures of the movement. As he observed, “This focus brought out more clearly the points of tension and the plurality of meanings within the movement. These dimensions tended to be obscured by the unifying ideology of organizations, where the need for integration is paramount.” He also recognized, however, the trade-offs involved in the use of natural groups:

Working with natural groups seemed to temper the artificiality of the laboratory situation, enabling actors to refer to a more or less consolidated collective identity. A particular group always has a separate existence beyond the objectives of the research, allowing it to retain within the experimental situation, a certain autonomy (and at times opacity) in its normal functioning. This procedure is not without its risks. While a particular group may not reflect accurately the network as a whole, it also can resist the experimental situation (i.e. remain opaque) through recourse to well-practiced rituals, complicity over internal codes and hidden rules. (Melucci 1989, 242–3)

It is rare for recruitment techniques for focus groups to be random; rather, selections are carried out through an intermediary or using snowballing. There is, however, a process of eligibility screening in relation to, for example, age, status, residence, and so on. In order to be able to make choices and initial contacts, it is often important to have information about the environment to be worked in. In the case of the research directed by Alberto Melucci on social movements in Milan, for example, a survey was conducted to reconstruct the network from which the group would be chosen.

As for the number of groups to aim for, as focus groups are normally used in combination with other techniques, even a few (say, about half a dozen) focus groups could be greatly enriching.

In our research on the social forums, the selection of the participants entailed a series of choices. Given the characteristics of the global justice movement in terms of extreme plurality (della Porta 2009a and 2009b), I thought it preferable not to use natural groups. Of course, working in environments involving a high density of relationships it was difficult to select groups composed of participants who did not know each other before the research began. Within each group, we thus combined members with different levels of reciprocal relationships in order to reflect the fluid and varied

dynamics through which communication and cooperation developed in the movement.

We therefore chose to work with six groups, each of which was homogeneous by political generation, being formed, respectively, by teenagers (high-school students; 17 to 20 years old); the new generation (in their twenties; 21 to 27 years old); the “lost generation” of the 1990s (socialized in a period characterized by low protest; 28 to 35 years old); the ‘77 generation (in Italy, particularly radical years; 36 to 43 years old); the ‘68 generation (44 to 59 years old); and the post-war (and still active) generation (60 years and older). The rationale for this decision was twofold. First of all, in a movement that our survey had confirmed as multi-generational, we wanted to check for the specificities in the conceptions of democracy of the different generations. Assuming that the conception of internal democracy had evolved with time, we wanted to analyze how learning processes and path dependencies interacted within each generation of activists. Second, we thought that age homogeneity would ease intra-group communication, avoiding potential positions of subjection with respect to the oldest.

Seeking to reflect the heterogeneous composition of the forum within each group, we involved individuals belonging to different movement areas but also without any reference area, and also sought to mix people with different degrees of involvement in the movement (excluding, however, the leaders), different ideological positions, and also “unorganized” members (that is, those who did not belong to specific associations). In fact, we tried to recruit representatives of the different associations and groups that had signed the founding charters of the social forum, also taking into consideration the high instance of participation by individuals with no references to specific associations or parties. This type of composition allowed for a discussion based on equality to develop and, within the data analysis, for an extremely interesting intergenerational comparison of the dynamics and content that emerged from the debates.

While, as mentioned, it was not possible to include only people who did not know each other in this (relatively) small movement environment, we did try to mix, as much as possible, activists with different organizational locations and, therefore, looser relations. With the aim of creating a configuration that was overall representative according to gender, political belonging, and degree of participation in the activities promoted by their own group of reference and the forum, we decided on a heterogeneous composition within each group in relation to the other dimensions. The groups were, first, heterogeneous in terms of gender. Despite the assertion of some authors that it is better to maintain separate groups for men and women, we preferred to construct mixed groups. The issue under discussion was not one that would produce situations of embarrassment linked to gender, and more importantly we considered the interaction between the two genders particularly interesting in order to understand the development of collective norms and identity in the social movement analyzed.

In the Field

A balance between listening and intervening is important when conducting focus groups, which often foresee reliance on professional facilitators. The latter, albeit without controlling the group, must avoid any participant dominating the discussion and encourage the most timid, avoid disclosures on sensitive themes (especially in really existing groups), and also check that all the themes are taken up during the course of the conversation. Normally, a de-briefing takes place at the end of the discussion, where the moderator can ask each member to synthesize their own point of view.

A focus group should not last for more than about 90 minutes, in order to avoid attention fading and participants leaving. Video recording, which allows body language to be picked up, has been considered important for the interpretation of participants' behavior, and it is now made easier by recent technological development. In addition, in focus groups the moderator is often joined by an observer, whose task it is to note non-verbal expressions.

While in-depth interviews and life histories often foresee more than one meeting with the same interviewee, in the case of focus groups, reconvening the group is logistically difficult, unless there is strong motivation among the interviewees with respect to the research theme (e.g., as in the aforementioned research projects led by Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine).

As for the size of the groups, six to eight participants is normally considered optimal to allow all participants to express their ideas, even if there is some risk of less debate and greater problems with dropouts (to avoid this, over-recruiting is usually practiced). As Francesca Polletta (2002) notes, group interviews with two to six people increase the accuracy of information, allowing participants to build upon each other's memories. It is, however, recommended to keep the number at the absolute minimum consistent with covering the range of the study population.

A comparison between Alberto Melucci's and Alain Touraine's research projects, both of which, as mentioned, approached the theme of identity in social movements, allows us to note similarities and potential differences in methods during fieldwork.

In the case of the French research, meetings were held between activists and their allies and opponents, with the group itself moving from a witness to a confrontation role and finally, to an analytic role. Of the two researchers involved, the secretary recorded the conversation, keeping some distance from the movement, while the agitator "helps the self-analysis, strengthens the group, organizes and animates the confrontation with the interlocutors, makes the debates within the group explicit" (Touraine 1978, 182). The role of the group changed along the process. The intervention aimed to push the participants from testimony about the struggle they participated in to the self-analysis of the basic principles of the movement's action. In order to achieve

this aim the group “*should not be centered on itself* and on its functioning but on the struggle and the movement it represents” (Touraine 1978, 192). In a first stage, the group acts as a testimony-group, reporting on past action; in a second stage, meeting with adversaries and allies (which are chosen among those nearer to the movement), the group is a confrontation-group. The group-figure, which moves towards analysis, can finally convert into an analyst-group, moving beyond the specific struggles in self-reflection from the point of view of the movement. In this moment, the researchers should “ask questions, clarify obscure points, reduce the silence, but also advance propositions, mention examples, enter the discussion” (Touraine 1978, 226). The researcher thus becomes an obstetrician, helping the group to deliver a movement discourse: to take the group to possible action, to spread the hope and the desire of a movement (Touraine 1978, 245).

In the Milanese research, experimental stages entailed both self-representation exercised by the group and debates on the representations allocated to them by allies and opposers (presented through video recordings). In the first phase, an experimental stage provided for a series of videotaped encounters, with the aim of making a collective sense emerge by multiplying voices. The experiments represented imaginary situations in which the group was stimulated to play with its identity (Melucci 1989, 246ff.). Subsequently,

The groups were invited to participate in a series of sessions in a specially prepared environment. This was an ordinary assembly room with seats arranged in a semi-circle around a researcher who conducted the session. An operator of a mobile VTR recorded the sitting on videotape, while two other researchers, visible but out of shot, acted as observers, taking notes on both the verbal and non verbal interactions. The videotape followed the speaker, occasionally providing a panoramic view of the group. Two types of stimulus situations were introduced. First, in the “who we are” situations, the group was asked to define itself. Second, in the “who you are” situations the group was presented with definitions from outside itself. At each stage a feedback session was conducted in which the group was shown an edited version of the recorded material selected according to the observation levels mentioned above. The playback served as a stimulus for further discussion and the feedback session was itself videotaped. There was a final session recapitulating the entire experience and allowing the participants to take stock. (Melucci 1989, 245)

In our research on the social forums, one researcher played the role of the facilitator, introducing various stimuli. We convened groups of about eight participants, and held only one session per group. Decisions we had to make on the way involved the location of the encounter. We chose the university as a neutral space, but sometimes we had to compromise on other places. We decided to record and fully transcribe all encounters, but not to videotape them, as we were afraid this would reduce the spontaneity of the debate.

We should add that besides the analysis of Internet websites, informal interviews, and the survey, two months of participant observation during the

assemblies of the Florence Social Forum allowed us to map the main groups and to single out the participants for the focus groups, and importantly also to create links of trust with the activists. Triangulation seemed indispensable in order to both prepare the field for the research, and to interpret the transcripts of the groups' meetings.

Our experience indicates that, beyond stimulating the participants to develop their reflection upon the sense and functioning of the movement, focus groups also provided a sort of experimental setting for the investigation of internal processes of deliberation. Although the activists did not "decide" in proper terms, they did, however, interact with each other, communicating on central issues. The climate of the discussion remained relaxed, and potential conflicts were addressed with irony and good humor.

Moreover, the focus group, with its use of mediators and facilitators as well as horizontal communication, mirrored the actual functioning of the movement's groups. This potential for horizontal communication (free from the pressure of decision making) did not go unnoticed among the activists, who appreciated the value of the focus groups as an open arena of communication. Notwithstanding logistical problems in the organization of the sessions (in particular, practical availability of the potential participants during a period of high mobilization), the research was welcomed by most of the activists. Although no material incentives (besides cookies and wine) were offered, participants seemed to be motivated by the opportunity for self-reflection. A report was sent to the participants, and a meeting was organized with them in order to discuss the research results.

Analysis

If in general the analysis of qualitative materials is complex, this is especially true with focus groups, given their chaotic nature, as "participants brainstormed, argued, misunderstood, interrupted, and ridiculed each other" (Bloor et al. 2001, 58).

In order to facilitate the analysis, there are some rules about transcription which allow for a careful reconstruction of the conversation. These include (Bloor et al. 2001):

- Transcribing all recorded speech:
- By all speakers,
- Even short "mmm yeahs";
- Without "tidying up";
- Transcribing non-verbal communication such as laughter;

- Body movements;
- Identifying the speakers (ask each to say their names and a few phrases at the beginning).

As with other texts to be analyzed in qualitative ways, an important practice is then coding that is based on linking “what the respondent says in his or her interview to the concepts and categories that will appear in the report” (Weiss 1994, 154). Coding includes descriptive (goals, strategies, people, events) and analytical categories. Coding proceeds by creating concepts by naming the item flagged in notes. The following techniques are distinguished:

- *open* coding, through which “the quantitative data is fragmented, examined, compared, contextualized and regrouped in categories” (Strati 1997, 154);
- *axial* coding, which allows empirical data to be recomposed, assembled, and integrated through the aggregation of sub-categories in categories;
- *selective* coding which allows the researcher to decide “around which phenomenon or event of the study all the categories will be integrated into.” (Strati 1997, 157)

Codes with meaning in light of the analytical frame are assigned through indexing, and are then aggregated by putting together all the parts of the transcription that were assigned the same code. A further, more theoretically oriented, step is the building of typologies. The analysis of the materials should in fact take into account various levels of meaning, linking the macro and the micro (Blee and Taylor 2002).

Of course, all coding is linked to the researcher’s theoretical questions. Touraine’s and Melucci’s respective research projects show some different ways of analyzing transcripts from focus groups. In the case of Touraine, an interest in the capacity of the different actors to undergo a conversion into a common discourse was reflected in the interpretation of the actions of different individuals as representative of various groups. Their lack of capacity to build a collective identity in the face of potential allies or adversaries was therefore considered as a sign of the non-existence of a movement. In Melucci’s research, more focused on the micro-dynamics of identity building, the analysis was instead oriented to single out the rich multiplicity of individual identities and their interactions inside the movements.

In the case of our analysis of focus groups, the material gathered was transcribed and then analyzed using the following techniques:

- transversal thematic analysis;
- analysis of discursive nodes of “key expressions”;
- lexical analysis. (Del Giorgio 2002)

Transversal analysis is based on the identification of central concepts that repeatedly arise in the words collected from the subjects on thematic ideas, on the isolation of the parts they refer to within each single text, and on their subsequent recomposition and analysis with a view to identifying a discourse on the theme (Ricolfi 1997). To complete and deepen the results emerging from this first phase, some key expressions were then identified within each text relative to each group, allowing for further comparison and investigation, not only of difference and similarities in the content of single discussions, but also of those emerging between the various groups. This technique is based on the preliminary definition of so-called “analysis plans,” identified with reference to the thematic ideas previously used to draft the outline for the interviews. The investigation was further deepened through the analysis of lexical contents.

The analyses of the group interviews were important in order to deepen our understanding of information coming from in-depth interviews. Here are a few examples:

First, interviews with activists had revealed pride in the “plurality of the movement.” As an interviewee of the Sicilian Social Forum pointed out, “it is important and necessary to defend and valorize the multiple beliefs and ideological, political, cultural and religious positions . . .” (in Piazza and Barbagallo 2003, 22). Focus groups confirmed that the activists indeed valued inclusiveness as part of the movement identity, revealing how this belief was constructed in the interactions between members of different groups. During them, activists repeatedly agreed in locating the movement’s strength in its capacity for “*networking*” associations and “individuals.” The movement was said to bring together “many situations . . . that in previous years, especially the last ten, did not come together enough, met around big issues for very short periods, always with a highly emotional impetus, while instead this is, I feel, the first experience I have had in such an alive way of contact and networking where the fact of being in contact and in a network is one of the most important factors . . . this is the positive thing . . . the value of the Social Forums . . .” (4G, p. 89). By the group members, the network was understood as more than a sum of groups: it is in the network that the activist “gets to know people, forms relationships, becomes a community” (4A, p. 92).

The focus groups also allowed us to locate the continuous demands for *participation* within a larger conception of politics. In one activist’s words, the movement marks “the passage from representation to participation: what the movement is looking for is not to involve people though delegation” (2C, p. 42). It is the discovery that “I don’t have to be represented but represent myself, so that I myself have to participate in something and don’t have to feel locked out” (4A, p. 88). The organizational values that the activists stressed were participation and respect for differences, which came up in the group interviews over and over again.

Linked with participation, the respect for *subjectivity* was collectively perceived as a new and positive aspect of the movement. In contrast to the

totalizing model of militancy in past movements, individual experiences and capacities were positively valued. In focus groups a quest for dispassionate, open confrontation emerged. For all the risks of manipulation and bureaucratization the activists identified, their shared hope was that the flexible, multilayer organizational structure might help build arenas for confrontation among different associations and subjectivities, expected not just to act together but also to transform each other reciprocally, building new identities and values, becoming communities. In the words of an activist, promptly supported by the others:

the desire for change is so widespread that it overcomes the organizations, the organizations can't manage to sustain it . . . there's this great spread of mailing lists, initiatives, leafleting: there's no one site or body that brings them all together . . . there's a very broad offer, in which the individuals can orient themselves without having to select exclusively, this is a movement open to all. (4A, p. 92)

The focus groups thus confirmed that, notwithstanding the aforementioned problems in implementing a deliberative model of internal democracy, there was a perceived capacity to *transform initial identities*. The participants in the focus groups converged around the importance given to the building of common values through what an activist called “fluidifying:”

I personally, in the contamination and in participation in the movement, have come back to believing in certain things and have come to realize that . . . it's one thing to arrive at a democratic situation more or less in assemblies where de facto more or less preconstituted positions clash, and then there's a vote and a majority and a minority, that's quite different from building a participatory pathway, in mutual respect, where the various positions fluidify and the various areas, even the organized ones . . . for in the Forum there are areas and organizations . . . including mine . . . that are really organized, yet there's a *new willingness to really fluidify*, for confrontation without wanting to pull this way or that, more or less, some people more and some less, then in the end you can do it all the same, but those who do not vote or maybe occasionally vote against are really such a marginal proportion, and those who have really shared their own motivations with others, that ultimately there's not that trauma that there is in the long run in those organizations that work with the old system instead . . . (3C, 66)

As this exchange during one focus group indicates, agreement easily consolidated around the need for different subjects to join together to “get it together” around concrete objectives, or at any rate build a gradually broader common path. The transcription shows how—typically for focus groups—multiple voices converge on common values:

4E: a Forum brings together absolutely different entities, but at least on the big issues they manage to come together . . . that's its richness . . . the capacity to bring together differing entities that can at least talk about the big issues. . . .

4C: I feel there's also a certain weakness in the Forum, namely . . . that according to me there's a weakness up to a certain point because even if it's maybe been a

strategically winning choice . . . namely to go forward for a long time coming together around particular points, leaving aside more systematic discussions, theoretical ones and so on . . . that is, I believe that even only a year ago, for instance, it would have been impossible to communicate with each other the way we are doing now, even if according to me confrontation does not come into the questions all that much . . . I repeat, it's fine that way, since if the confrontation had been a year ago according to me the Social Forum would immediately have split, it wouldn't have stood up, and maybe today the times would be ripe, perhaps . . . I don't know, to try to do, I am not saying a systematic analysis we can all agree on, but at least to try focusing a little more. . . .

4F: Yes, I too think this method worked, I don't know whether over time, there you are . . . but for now it's maybe the method that has enabled so many different entities to stay together . . . the method you were talking about, of going ahead only on some things, emphasizing the points of convergence, and going forward . . .

4F: without tackling any maybe too thorny points, no? But likely in time the thing . . . but so far the experience is very positive in that sense . . . me, given we're talking about the 80s . . . I don't remember anything of this sort . . . there's always been communication difficulties among different universes . . . this type of capacity for synthesis had never existed, and that's very positive, even if it's based on the premise of not tackling some thorny points that sooner or later will come along. (Del Giorgio 2005, 89–90)

As with other qualitative techniques, the reporting style when using materials from focus groups privileges in-depth analysis of texts which are at times also quite long, in order to reflect the process of development of a common narrative in the small groups.

Focus Groups: Some Conclusions

Rarely used in research on social movements, focus groups (and/or group interviews) are nowadays employed more and more as an auxiliary technique of data collection, triangulated with others, whether qualitative or quantitative. Relatively easy to organize, they are not, however, easy to analyze, as individual and collective dynamics tend to be intertwined.

In order to facilitate analysis, methodological choices about the type of groups, their size and composition, as well as the duration and climate of the interviews, are extremely important. Even if unstructured and fluid, the focus of the interviews must be resonant with research interests, and interviewers play an important role in mediating, but also stimulating the discussion.

Particularly interesting for social movement studies is the strength of focus groups in terms of revealing group norms, or even collective identities. During the debates, participants reveal both convergences and differences, agreement and disagreement. Moreover, focus groups are powerful

instruments for investigating interactions and decision-making mechanisms. In this sense, as observed, they tend to resonate with the stress of contemporary movements on dialogue, consensus, and deliberation.

■ NOTE

1. For more details, see the research report (della Porta 2003).

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13 Surveying Protestors

Why and How

Massimiliano Andretta and Donatella della Porta

After the Strange Lacuna: An Introduction to Survey Method in Social Movements Studies

Mainstream social movement studies have generally focused on macro- and meso-level analyses. Researchers have theorized about social movements as a whole, identity formation, and social transformations (Touraine 1978; Melucci 1996); investigated complex network structures in relation to strategies and identities (Diani and McAdam 2003); stressed the crucial role of organizations in mobilizing people into collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1987); and studied series of protest events in a political approach perspective (Tilly 1978, 1986; Tarrow 1989).

This does not mean that scholars have completely neglected micro-level analysis, as the individual's involvement in social movements has been studied from a micro-sociological perspective (Gurr 1970; Blumer 1971; Turner and Killian 1987) by emphasizing various phases of the socialization process, pointing to protestors' "structural availability" and "cognitive frames" (McAdam 1988, 1989), or looking at the interactions between protestors, social movements activities, and public authorities (della Porta 1995).

Most of these studies focusing (also) on the individual level, however, have used qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and life histories (della Porta 2014a and 2014b), which provide us with an intensive understanding of the individuals involved but offer limited generalization of empirical findings. If it would be a little overstated to say that the most recent developments of social movements theory have "let the individual level unexplored" (Fillieule and Blanchard 2006, 7), it is certainly true that macro- and meso-level analyses have dominated the social movement literature.

On its side, mainstream political science has explored the issue of political participation, including non-conventional participation, by relying mostly on surveys of general populations (Milbrath and Goel 1977; Barnes and Kaase et al. 1979; Topf 1995; Dalton 1996; Norris 2002, and others). Here, the individual is seen as the central unit of analysis. Those studies have traditionally stressed a class divide in political participation which actually emerges as

limited and selective, since it increases with social status (Lagroye 1993, 312). Higher levels of participation were found, *ceteris paribus*, among the better educated, the middle classes, men, the medium-age cohort, married people, city residents, the ethnic majority group, and citizens involved in voluntary associations (Milbrath and Goel 1977). Usually, higher social status implies more material resources (as well as more free time) to invest in political participation, but also a higher probability of being successful (via personal relationships with powerful individuals) and especially a higher sense of personal achievement. Psychological disadvantages overlap with social disadvantages, reducing the perception of one's own "droit de parole" (Bourdieu 1979, 180). The increase in unconventional forms of participation had only a limited equalizing effect with regard to gender, age, and education (Topf 1995, 78).

However, general surveys have severe limitations when applied to analyzing social movement activists. First of all, though citizens are increasingly involved in unconventional forms of action, they often constitute a sub-sample with low N, which implies difficulties in exploring variations inside it.

Second, existing large surveys collect information which is usually very generic on participation in protest. The individual to which they refer is "isolated from her environment" and is asked questions about which she may have little interest and little information (Fillieule and Blanchard 2006). Declaring past participation in, for instance, "demonstrations," does not say anything about what demonstration was attended, on what issues, organized by whom, and for what reasons. The resulting sub-sample of individuals who declare that they have protested is the aggregation of very heterogeneous individuals, who mobilized for very different issues and for very different reasons.

In contrast, surveying individuals during a process of mobilization allows the researcher not only to collect a large amount of information on protestors, but also to contextualize the results, to design questionnaires that address relevant and unexplored questions about individual participation, and to collect higher quality data. During a protest event, respondents are actually protesting; they are doing so in a collective process (there are organizations that called for actions, they are there with other friends or co-members, etc.); they know quite well the issues about which they are interviewed; and, finally, they are motivated in expressing their views.

With a few exceptions in the 1970s, however, only since the second half of the 1990s have some scholars begun directly surveying people while they protest. In 1997, Favre, Fillieule, and Mayer reviewed the few studies that had applied this method, announcing the "end of a strange lacuna" in social movement literature. Since then, several studies have used surveys at demonstrations more intensively and systematically.

A recent assessment of the social science literature in the field mentions only three earlier surveys of protest events: a comparison of four rallies that were held in 1970 and 1973 in the United States (Seidler et al. 1976;

Meyer, Seidler, and MacGillivray 1977; Meyer and Seidler 1978); a survey of demonstrators at a national anti-nuclear rally held in Washington, DC in 1979 (Ladd et al. 1983); and another at a march in Sheffield against the visit of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Waddington et al. 1988). In the 1990s, surveys at demonstrations began to spread, with three surveys at protest marches in France conducted in 1994 (see Favre, Fillieule, and Mayer 1997; Fillieule 1997) and four at marches in Belgium in 1998 (van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). However, in 2000, surveys at protest events began to be used increasingly often in the wave of the global cycle of protest that became visible in Seattle in 1999. Among others, the *Gruppo di Ricerca sull’Azione Collettiva in Europa* (GRACE) at the University of Florence surveyed participants at the anti-G8 protest in Genoa, the Peace March Perugia–Assisi in 2001, and at the first European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 (Andretta et al. 2002; Andretta et al. 2003; della Porta et al. 2006); the *Groupe de recherches sur l’activisme altermondialiste* (GRAAL, University of Paris Sorbonne) and the *Centre de Recherche sur l’Action Politique* (CRAPUL, University of Lausanne Switzerland) covered the anti-G8 protest in the French-Swiss region of Evian-Lausanne-Geneva and the Second European Social Forum in Paris, both in 2003 (Agrikoliansky and Sommier 2005; Fillieule and Blanchard 2006). A survey was conducted in eight countries during the 15 February Global Day of Action in 2003 against the war in Iraq (Walgrave and Rucht 2010). Bedoyan and Van Aelst (2003) surveyed a protest march in Brussels on December 14, 2001, Roth and Rucht (1991) studied protests against unemployment in four German cities, and Giugni, Bandler, and Eggert (2006) surveyed the protest events in Zurich and Davos in 2004. A survey was also conducted at the Athens European Social Forum (ESF) in 2006 under the Demos project (della Porta 2009), while many surveys have been conducted since 2008, with standardized questionnaires and sampling strategy, within the Contextualizing Contestation project.

Beyond providing data on the sociographic and political backgrounds of the activists, as well as their individual attitudes and behaviors, the research mentioned here also helped to raise some main methodological caveats in this specific use of survey data. In this chapter, we discuss this method and some of its limitations, suggest ways to address challenges, show how to design a questionnaire for a survey, and illustrate the results acquired through its use. We do so by referring especially to two pieces of comparative research using surveys in which we have been involved, namely, the “Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization in Society” (DEMOS) project, coordinated by Donatella della Porta,¹ and the “Contextualizing Contestation” project, conducted by a network of researchers coordinated by Klandermans and Walgrave, which surveyed a large number of demonstrations in various countries (see, e.g., van Stekelenburg et al. 2012).²

Learning about the Field

Prior to fieldwork, it is always necessary to acquire a substantial knowledge of the movement in order to, first, choose the right events to cover and, second, build a sampling strategy that reflects the variation in terms of movement components.

As many events are heterogeneous in terms of participants, it is first important to learn about the characteristics of the diverse organizers. To mention one example, when we surveyed the Genoa protest in 2001, we invested time and energy in gathering as much information as possible on all the components involved in the protest. We interviewed representatives of several organizations, we monitored SMOs websites, we read many newspaper articles, and we came to know, not only the components of the movement in Genoa (their ideology, their action repertoire, their type of organization), but also the expected number of participants for each component.

This knowledge was an important basis for several steps of the research, from the construction of the questionnaire to the sampling, since in any type of protest event (and especially in the most complex ones) the space is usually meaningfully divided among the various components of broad coalitions of organizations and individuals. This was particularly the case in Genoa, where different sub-coalitions were hosted in different parts of the city, organizing different protest events and “thematic squares” (see Figure 13.1 for an illustration of the various components of the movement in Genoa).

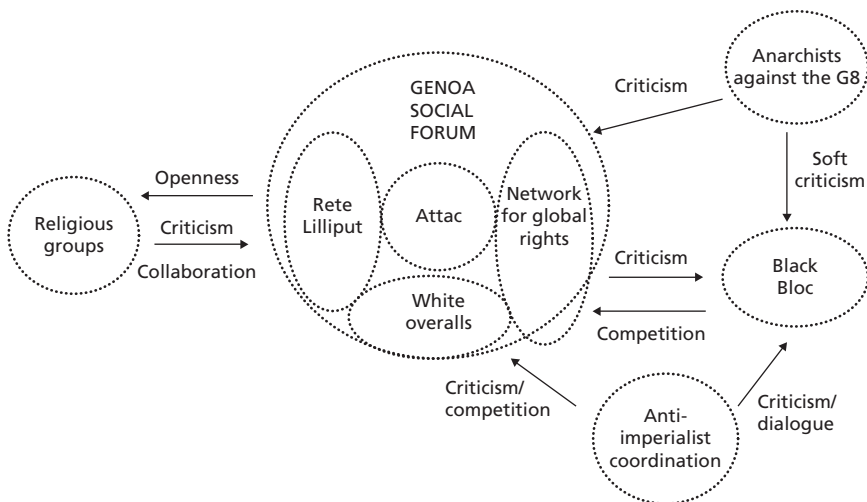


Figure 13.1 Key Genoa Protest Networks

Source: Andretta et al. 2002, 39.

A relevant question, with implications for the representativeness of the sample, concerns the status of the specific surveyed demonstrations vis-à-vis the social movement to be investigated. While social movements are complex networks of networks characterized by a changing degree of density, social movement events never involve all components equally. Protest events also attract newcomers, as well as people who are only marginally involved in a movement. Surveys at protest events address situations in which “participation is generally not submitted to any condition. People do not need to be a member of an organization, they usually do not have to register (apart from the case of social forums where you have to pay fees), etc. That means that the reference population, the crowd itself, can be composed of core militants, sympathizers, bystanders, sightseers, people who are lost, tourists, and sometimes opponents! A crowd can’t be considered as equal to a social movement constituency. Its heterogeneity is far more important and different in nature” (Fillieule and Blanchard 2006). The sample therefore reflects the specific characteristics of these non-random sub-samples of the movement population. The variety in terms of degree of commitment, identification, and previous experience actually enriches the possibility of analysis, but one should be cautious in generalizing results to the smaller circles of the most committed activists.

Additionally, given the high material and psychological costs of traveling, national and, especially, local activists are largely over-represented in any transnational event: at the first ESF, for instance, the largest component of participants was from Tuscany, and Italians were, of course, more numerous than non-Italians. Samples that may respect the composition of a certain event fairly well do not therefore reflect the characteristics of national and (even less) transnational movements. The counter-summits targeting the EU are expected to reflect the characteristics of the national movements that organized and hosted them: a demonstration targeting the EU in pro-EU Belgium will have different social and political bases from a similar one in Eurosceptic Sweden (see, e.g., Bédoyan and van Aelst 2003 on the EU counter-summit in Brussels at the end of 2001 and Peterson 2006 on the EU counter-summit in Gothenburg in 2002).

Gathering information well in advance of the demonstration by interviewing representatives of the promoting organizations and the police will allow the research team to estimate how many people are expected to participate and whether some kind of disorder is expected. Very large marches present particular challenges if one aims at a representative sample, while very small ones might not be useful to cover at all. The potential for violence also puts the distribution of questionnaires at risk. For this reason, the protocol of the CCC project foresees preliminary interviews with organizers and police officers in order to get an estimate of the number of participants and the generally expected climate at the protest. As most protests are open air, a weather forecast is also useful.

Interviewing organizations and the police is useful for several reasons:

1. to gather as much information as possible on the expected number of participants, the issues of the demonstration, the organizational frame, the political affiliation, the organization's repertoire of action, and so on;
2. to acquire information about what is expected to happen during the demonstration in terms of possible disorder by both organizations and the police;
3. to have an idea of how both the organizations and the police intend to manage the protest and protect the safety of the participants. For instance, researchers may ask the organizations if they will use security stewards, as well as asking police if they consider the demonstration problematic. How will police be disposed, with which tools? Have they been in contact before the demonstration to cooperate with and/or negotiate public order matters?

Some of this information will be used to define the best sampling strategy, to draft questions related to the issues of the demonstration, and to instruct the interviewers on dealing with the specific conditions of that demonstration. Some other information will also be useful in contextualizing the analysis of the survey data.

How to Design a Questionnaire

As for other techniques using standardized instruments, a most important part of the research is the designing of the questionnaire used for data collection. The researcher has to devote time and energy to choosing questions, keeping in mind that the interview should be short enough to discourage dropouts, and the questions clear enough to constitute valid indicators.

The starting point is related to the research questions, and, as in any kind of empirical instrument, the questionnaire should reflect theoretically relevant questions. Even when the research question is purely explorative—for example, one wants to know “Who is that (wo)man in the street?” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001)—asking the correct and theoretically sound questions is necessary to make later sense of the data collected.

Research focusing on social movement activists can help in addressing some relevant questions about:

- sociographic features: Who are the people who protest? Workers? Middle-class? Students?

- resource mobilization: Are resources important to predict individual participation in protest actions? Do organizations play a crucial role in recruiting people to protest events?
- identity and frame: Are individuals embedded in collective identities? Do they frame the issues on which they mobilize in the same ways as organizations do? Are their identity, frames, perceptions shaped by collective action?
- political process approach: How is the political context important for individuals?

These might constitute main sections in the questionnaire, as they are fundamental to exploring many hypotheses of both social movement and political participation literature by means of quantitative analysis of survey data (some examples of questions referring to them are illustrated in Table 13.1).

Some important choices refer to the closure of the questions. First of all, questionnaires can—and often do—contain some open questions. These are particularly useful when the researcher wants to investigate new issues and relations. They are, however, more complicated to use for quantitative analysis, as they have to be re-coded into categories.

Most of the questions are in fact closed—that is, possible answers take the form of options and are pre-defined in the questionnaires. There can be different types of closure of a question, some nominal (with options referring to categories), some with a dichotomy (with a yes/no option), some with a Likert scale (a 4–5-point scale of options ordered from a minimum to a maximum degree in which each point in the scale has a meaning), and some with pure scales (with options shown in numeric order) (see Table 13.1).

When deciding on the closure of questions, standardization increases the potential for comparison, either with surveys on the entire population or with other surveys at protest events. Standardization means, in fact, that the wording of a question or set of questions used for a specific indicator is the same as that used in other surveys relevant for the research issue under investigation, and with which the researcher wants to compare her own findings. Before designing the questionnaire, then, it is highly advisable for the researcher to collect the questionnaires used in similar studies, usually reported in the appendices of books and articles. She may also be interested in comparing her data with those referring to the general population, and thus will use similar questions. In comparative surveys (such as the Demos and the CCC projects), or in protest events with a multinational population, the translation of the questionnaire is an additional, relevant, and difficult, task.

Translating requires care. If the translation is not done carefully, it may produce misinterpretation of questions and/or answers on the respondent's side and then pose problems of cross-national comparability. There are in fact several ways to improve the translation of the questionnaire from one (source)

Table 13.1 Examples of Standardized and Closed Questions (CCC Project)

Forms of closure	Wording	Type of indicator	Closure												
Nominal	What is your employment situation?	Socio-graphic	<input type="checkbox"/> I work full-time (including maternity leave or other temporary absence). <input type="checkbox"/> I work part-time (including maternity leave or other temporary absence). ... <input type="checkbox"/> I am unemployed/between jobs. ... <input type="checkbox"/> Other:												
Dichotomy	Are you ...?	Socio-graphic	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female												
Dichotomy	There are many things people can do to prevent or promote change. Have you, <i>in the past 12 months</i> ...?	Political behavior	Yes/No taken part in direct action? <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ... <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> ... <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>												
Likert	To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Beliefs	Most politicians make a lot of promises but do not actually do anything. Strongly disagree Disagree Neither Agree Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>												
Likert	Please indicate, in general, how much you would say that you trust each of the following (types of) institutions.	Political attitudes	NOT at not Not very Somewhat Very much <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> National Government												
Scale	In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right." Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?	Political attitudes	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Left</td> <td></td> <td>Right</td> <td>Do not know</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> 88</td> </tr> </table>	Left		Right	Do not know		0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10				<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> 88
Left		Right	Do not know												
	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10														
	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> 88												

language to another (target) language (Harkness, Villar, and Edwards 2010, 121–2). In the context of protest surveys, the most relevant are the following:

- **word-for-word translation:** operates at the word level and tries to match a word-meaning equivalence between two languages. For instance, the term “demonstration” in English would be better translated in Italian as “manifestazione” or “corteo” than as “dimostrazione,” which is rarely used among Italian protestors.

- close translation: tries to “remain close to the semantic import, the vocabulary, and the structure of the source text but also to meet target language requirements regarding vocabulary, idiom, and sentence structure” (Harkness, Villar, and Edwards 2010, 122). For instance, in English you can start a question related to the previous one with a simple “and what about . . .”; but in other languages you may need to use a different phrasing: “How do you evaluate the behavior of the police in this demonstration?. . . And what about the demonstrators?” In Italian, it would be “Come giudica (judge and not evaluate) il comportamento della polizia durante la manifestazione (during this demonstration)?. . . E cosa ci dice dei manifestanti (and what do you tell us about the demonstrators)?”

In the CCC project, the process of translation was as follows: researcher A translated question X from the source language to the target language, while researcher B re-translated the same question from the target language to the source language, two or three times until the equivalence became evident.

Another option is to explore how similar questions have been translated in past survey research.

If a researcher is interested in a new phenomenon or wants to explore additional characteristics of a phenomenon, she will need to draft new questions with a new wording and/or closure. Usually new questions are used when a researcher wants to explore a new variable or set of variables that are not included in previous questionnaires.

Besides the wording, phrasing, and sentence structure of the questions, the researcher should also pay attention to the order of the questions and to the place of the questions in the questionnaire structure. For instance, boring or sensitive questions should be placed at the end, to avoid a bored or suspicious respondent deciding to not fill out the whole survey once she reads the first questions. That is why questions on sociographic features are generally placed at the end of a questionnaire.

Moreover, in order to avoid response set, it is not advisable to place questions having the same form of closure on the same page. When this is not avoidable, researchers may decide to present a different order of the options for different sets of questions: for instance, some questions are presented with a Likert ordered from a minimum to a maximum degree and others with a Likert ordered from a maximum to a minimum degree. This strategy can help in keeping the attention of the respondent high. At the same time, one should also keep in mind the need to avoid confusing the interviewee with too many moves from one type of scale to another.

Questionnaires then have to be carefully tested. This can be done by using pre-field methods or field methods (Presser et al. 2004). In the first case, the test is done under quasi-laboratory conditions and includes expert group reviews, cognitive interviews, and focus groups. Usually, pre-field tests focus

on testing single questions or a group of questions, rather than the questionnaire as a whole; the main aim is to collect information on how respondents proceed when answering those questions. Field methods are instead applied under the same or similar field conditions (pilot studies) and follow the same sample procedures to select the same type of respondents. The focus is on the whole procedure and on the consistency of the whole questionnaire. Particularly relevant in these pilot studies is the analysis of response rates, item consistency, and missing answers.

Let us give an illustration of the whole process of questionnaire design, taken from our own experience with the use of this method within the “Demos” project, which developed questions on the much less studied dimensions of democracy inside and outside movements (della Porta 2009).

Contributing to several debates on social movements (see section headed “How to Use Data from Surveys”), our research aimed to go beyond already explored questions—whose indicators were largely built by recurring to standardized items—by focusing on the influence of these different dimensions of participation on conceptions and (perceived) practices of democracy. For the latter, we referred to how respondents perceived democracy working in their organizations and within the movement as whole, while for the former, we referred to how respondents believed democracy should work in general.

The Demos project was planned to investigate two intertwined new phenomena. On the one hand, a strong and diffuse transnational global movement was occupying the political scene all around the world, and little research had been conducted on it. On the other hand, such global movements were challenging traditional conceptions and practices of democracy in many respects, calling for a more interactional, dialogical, and process-based type of democratic ideals and practices.

Though the project was designed to combine several methods of analysis—including content analysis of documents and SMOs’ statutes, website analysis, surveys of SMOs, and participant observation—our interest in the micro-dimension of the conceptions and practices of democracy was also reflected in the activists’ survey we carried out during the Fourth European Social Forum in Athens on May 3–6, 2006. The idea was to design a questionnaire focusing on respondents’ normative conceptions and actual perceptions of democratic practices, at the three levels of the group, the movement, and the political institutions in general. Since ours was the first attempt to develop a questionnaire on conceptions and practices of democracy, we devoted a long and intense time to questionnaire testing and redrafting, with particular attention to the wording of the new variables.

For each of these dimensions, we asked respondents about their level of agreement with four statements on “how political decisions are/should be taken.” The first statement sets two groups in opposition: those who think that

primarily the *quality of argument* should make a difference, regardless of who voices the argument; and those who think that *resourceful* and active groups/individuals should have more weight. The second statement distinguishes between those who think that it is always important for opponents to accept each other as *equal*, and those who believe that, in political conflicts, there are situations in which *mutual acceptance is not important*. The third statement separates those whose normative idea of democracy is compatible with *delegation of power* from those who think that the *participation of all* interested persons should always be a priority; and finally, the last statement sets those who believe that decisions should be taken by *voting* in opposition to those who are convinced that they should be taken by *consensus*. Each of these statements was presented in a polarized form: activists could position themselves on a scale ranging from 0 (argument, equal discussants, delegation, and voting) to 3 (resources, no mutual acceptance, full participation, and consensus). (Figure 13.2 shows how the items were built at the group level.)

We introduced each group of questions for each dimension in the following way: which of the opposing statements below better describe the meetings of your group/decision making of the networks and the campaigns of the global movement/how do you think political decisions should be taken in general?

The closure of the items then takes a scale form, which helps the respondent to decide on which side of the two poles of meanings to place her evaluation. A medium option, such as a neither/nor option, was deliberately excluded to force respondents to choose one side (see Figure 13.2).

First, the German team in collaboration with the EUI team developed a draft questionnaire containing questions on activism, group affiliation, and

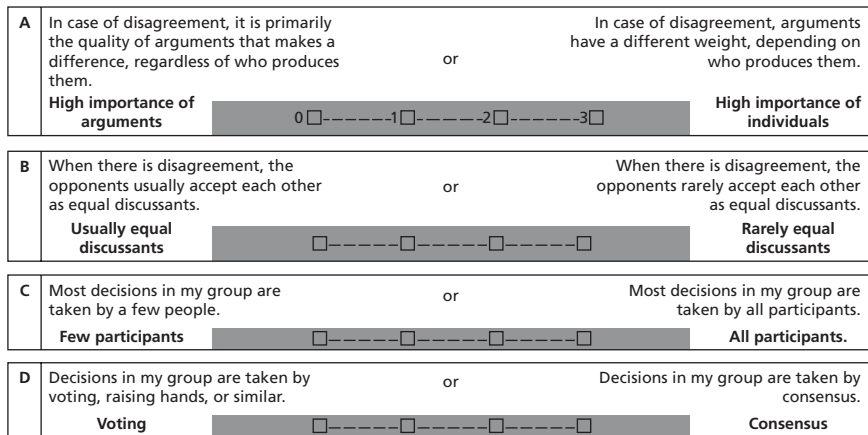


Figure 13.2 Drafting of the Items Related to Democratic Values, Norms, and Practices among Global Movement Activists (Demos project)

concepts of democracy. Different versions of the questionnaires were tested in the United Kingdom and Germany in 2005, and twice in Italy in 2006. In Britain, a pre-test was run at the anti-G8 protest at Gleneagles in July 2005, where the British team undertook short face-to-face interviews with 493 participants in the Make Poverty History march and distributed 2,000 longer self-completion questionnaires to marchers (with a response rate of 28 percent). In Germany, a revised questionnaire was used to survey participants at the first national Social Forum in Erfurt, July 21–24, 2005, where 785 questionnaires were handed out in the registration area and 310 returned (response rate of approximately 40 percent). A further different version of the questionnaire was tested by the EUI team during the march against the Bolkestein directive, which, in parallel with marches in other European cities, was held in Rome on October 15, 2005. During this event, we distributed 723 questionnaires, 475 (65.6 percent) of which were fully completed and returned.

We analyzed the results of the pre-test, paying special attention to missing values and variations in responses. These tests indicated that the questionnaire had to be shortened and that some variables/values needed to be rephrased, cut, or substituted. After this meeting, a working committee started a long deliberation process that concluded with a “fair consensus” on the final draft, which was once again tested in Italy in April 2006, with satisfying results: about 30 participants in a seminar organized by Italian NGOs (a conference by Serge Latouche in Florence) filled out the questionnaire in a complete way.

Sampling Protestors: Methods and Caveats

In terms of quality of data, all surveys must address problems related to sampling error (not all members of the population have the same chances of being included in the sample); drop-out errors (related to the specific characteristics of those who refuse to be interviewed); errors in understanding (respondents answer without understanding the questions); and missing errors (a certain percentage does not respond to specific questions). Surveys of individuals in protest events—while they should reduce errors in understanding, since the specific population interviewed is asked questions on which it has substantial knowledge—do not reduce the other errors and have more problems related to sampling error.

Some techniques have been suggested to address sampling error. As Fillieule and Blanchard (2006) recently summarized, “Since it is not possible to use a sampling strategy based on quotas, one has to use a probabilistic method, that is to say, to guarantee that all possible participants would have equal opportunity of being interviewed.” In order to devise a technique to

achieve this aim, the researcher has to take into account the symbolic allocation of spaces in a demonstration, as well as demonstrators' habits. In fact, at demonstrations: "people do assemble at a meeting point, march under a banner, depending on multiple belongings, following a march order that is predetermined by the organisers. Others are more erratic, travelling from one group to another, from the very heart of the demonstration to its margins. These numerous spatial and temporal distributions have a clear consequence: one must use two different methods, depending on which stage of a demonstration is concerned, the assembling phase or the march itself" (Fillieule 1997, methodological appendix).

However, demonstrations are not the only protest events in which individual surveys have been conducted. The global cycle of protest at the beginning of the millennium, for instance, has produced innovations in the collective action repertoire that scholars must consider in their research design. In this case, demonstrations were coupled with "thematic squares" and indoor activities of issue discussions and dissemination, organized in workshops, during collective gatherings against inter-governmental organizations meetings (counter-meetings) or during the social forums. Sampling strategies must be adapted to the specific form of protest.

SAMPLING STRATEGIES AT DEMONSTRATIONS

By and large, surveys of protestors have mainly been conducted during demonstrations, mostly during marches, but also at static demonstrations. In this case, the sampling strategy aims at constructing a random sample that could represent the universe of the population that is actually protesting.

Randomizing a moving march is not easy. In order to address this challenge, the "CCC" research group designed a standardized sampling procedure (van Stekelenburg et al. 2012), which was applied to about 80 demonstrations in several countries. The procedure is based on the assumption that a march is not unstructured and follows informal rules, which have been shaped over more than 150 years of such practices (Fillieule and Tartakowsky 2008). In general, marches are structured by rows, which constitute their basic units. In order to offer all participants equal chances to be interviewed, the *n*th person in every *n*th row of a march is selected (e.g. Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001; van Stekelenburg et al. 2012).

Once a march is selected, the representativeness of interviewees can be improved by the use of pointers. In the CCC project, each team is composed of two relevant figures: the interviewers, who must be trained before the demonstration; and the pointers, who should be the more experienced members of the team. Once in the field, pointers count the rows, "to ensure a fair dispersion of questionnaires over the marching column and sent interviewers,

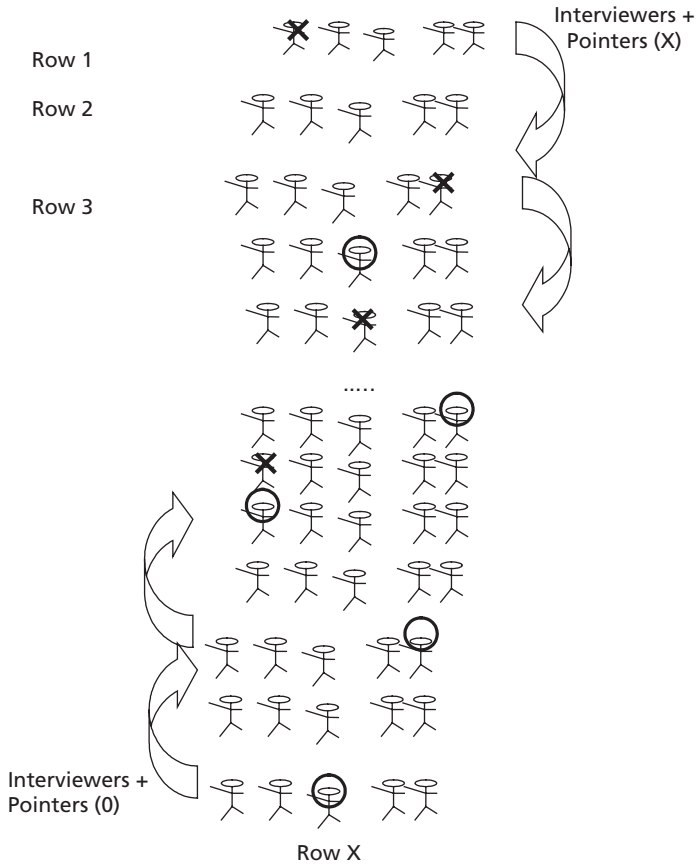


Figure 13.3 Sampling Procedure in Marches

Source: van Stekelenburg et al. 2012, 258.

the team is divided into two groups moving one from the start and one from the end of the march” (see Figure 13.3).

SAMPLING STRATEGIES AT STATIC DEMONSTRATIONS

Sometimes, demonstrations are carried out in a static way, for instance when participants are called to stand in a square, which can have a circular or a rectangular shape, or in a broad avenue, often—but not always—in front of a symbolic or institutional building. In those cases, the work in the field is easier, essentially because people do not move (or move less). This means that participants are easier to approach, but also that researchers can make a more accurate estimation

of their number, and therefore of the proportion of protestors to target in the distribution of the questionnaires (e.g., one out of five). However, the method illustrated here for marches needs to be modified. If the static demonstration is carried out in circular square, to maximize the chance that each participant has an equal likelihood of being included in the study, the space is mentally divided into several sections, delimited by the radii of an ideal circumference departing from its center, with pointers and interviewers distributed at the edges of each sector. Then, “interviewers start at the outer circle followed by handing out a survey two steps from the outer circle in the direction of the center of the square. The another questionnaire is handed out another four steps further in the direction of the square and so on” (van Stekelenburg, et al. 2012, 258). It is important to remember that, for each step, the pointer has to point the selected participant by alternating her position, on the right, at the center and on the left of each sector step. The same procedure needs to be applied, with interviewers scaling up their section from the center to its edge. Finally, if the space is a broad avenue or a rectangular square, the one should mentally divide it following a “bars” method, with several lines intersecting the left and on the right. The two groups of pointers/ interviewers start one on the left and one on the right of the space (square or avenue) (van Stekelenburg, et al. 2012).

Also in case of static demonstrations, the researchers can face several problems related to people moving from one section to another, or joining in only later on. Obviously, they will never find the ideal situation illustrated in a paper or in a figure. The point of the method is to maximize the chance to build a representative sample which, in our view, means to build a sample as representative as possible, finding good compromises between the ideal world of the researchers and the messy reality of a protest event.

SAMPLING STRATEGIES AT COUNTER-SUMMITS AND SOCIAL FORUMS

For some protest events, involving a mix of forms of action, the sampling strategies have to be adapted to cover each (or the most important) of them. Taking into account the “combination” of repertoires during counter-meetings and social forums, for instance, most of the surveys aimed at analyzing the global justice movement (GJM) used a two-step sampling procedure. The first step involves the distribution of questionnaires at the gathering space, usually “divided in advance into sectors clearly identified by some spatial distinguishing marks” where activists of different groups converge. In each sector, the interviewers select “the Xth person in a group” (Fillieule and Blanchard 2006). The sample for a survey conducted during the days of the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in 2001 included people selected randomly over the various initiatives (“theme-based piazzas,” debates,

campsites, etc.), in order to cover the various “souls” of the movement (Andretta et al. 2002). The sample for a survey of the first European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 (della Porta et al. 2006) and for a counter-summit against the G8 meeting in Evian (which involved a cross-border demonstration between France and Switzerland) were similarly constructed (Fillieule et al. 2004). This was also the strategy used at the Athens ESF, in an effort to exploit the nature of the event as a long-lasting meeting during which there was enough time to complete and return the questionnaire (della Porta 2009). If the isolated spaces are “workshops,” usually attended by 20 to 40 participants, a sampling strategy within each is not needed, and interviewers may hand a questionnaire to each participant. Questionnaires might also be administered during the protest march itself, following the random strategy generally adopted in cases of demonstrations (see the previous section, “Sampling Strategies at Static Demonstrations”).

The basic idea when sampling activists in such types of events is to isolate delimited spaces within the multi-space composition of a counter-meeting or social forum, so that each isolated space can be surveyed separately. In cases of large assemblies, thematic squares, and the like, the same procedure as used for static demonstrations can be used (as described in the previous section, “Sampling Strategies at Static Demonstrations”). In the case of surveys conducted in counter-meetings, the sampling followed a random strategy: interviewers were asked to choose people based on variations of gender and age.

In all these cases, since purely random sampling is impossible given the lack of knowledge on the universe of participants, the representativeness of the sampled interviewees is a critical issue to be monitored in relation to the known dimensions of the universe. In fact, in these studies there is a double problem of representativeness error: first, the representativeness of the sub-samples in each delimited space, and second, the representativeness of the selected delimited spaces. The best way to proceed is to combine the random strategy with a sampling strategy that maximizes the variation in terms of individual characteristics (gender and age) and movement components (organizations and ideologies).

In addition to sampling error, another potential bias is introduced by participants who refuse to take the questionnaires or do not return them. Due to logistical difficulties, in fact, interviews can rarely be done face-to-face. Respondents are thus asked either to return the questionnaires at a collecting point, or to fill them in and mail them back. For instance, the return rate for questionnaires distributed at the February 15 global day of action varied between 37 percent for the Spanish march and 54 percent for the Netherlands (Walgrave and Verhulst 2004). Other questionnaires have yielded similar results (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). The peculiarities of the respondents in terms of age, gender, and education can, of course, bias the results.

In order to be aware of the distortion introduced by the differing tendencies of different people to take and return a questionnaire, the recording of some

information about those who refuse to take the questionnaire as well as on the population of those who accept can be useful (in fact, such a strategy was adopted in the CCC project). For example, shorter (one-page) face-to-face questionnaires can be distributed to a sub-sample of those who receive the longer surveys. These are meant to control for the representativeness of the sample and contain relevant questions that are also included in the postal questionnaire. A comparison between the results of face-to-face interviews and returned questionnaires in postal surveys can help to control the bias in returning questionnaires. The postal questionnaire sample can in fact be compared on relevant variables with the face-to-face one and, if the distortion is statistically significant on one or more variables, the sample can be weighted accordingly.

The sample can also be compared with available data on the population surveyed. For instance, for the GSF survey, the composition of the surveyed sample by organizational area was compared with the estimates of the number of participants from the various networks provided by the organizers on the eve of the protests.³ For the first ESF survey and the Athens ESF, the distribution of the sample according to nationality was compared with that of those enrolled at the Forum (della Porta et al. 2006; della Porta 2009).

Especially for transnational protest events, basic decisions affecting the representativeness of the sample relate to the language used in the questionnaires. Since activists may be expected to more willingly respond to a questionnaire in their mother tongue, the decision if and in how many and which languages to translate the questionnaire has an effect on the final sample. For instance, although using more or less the same techniques for sampling, the choice to distribute questionnaires only in Italian at an anti-G8 survey was reflected in a sample almost entirely composed of Italians, while the translation into English, French, Spanish, and German at the Florence and Athens ESFs produced multinational samples (della Porta et al. 2006; della Porta 2009).

In the Field

Specific to surveys at protest events, in general, is the highly emotionally charged environment in which questionnaires are distributed (and, possibly, collected). As Fillieule and Blanchard (2006) noted,

People attending a protest event or a political rally are by nature in an expressive situation. They do actually express their feelings and their opinions, if only by being there, by chanting and shouting slogans, by raising their fists, by wearing masks or costumes, by holding banners or placards. Two consequences follow. One is that people's willingness to participate is generally optimal, apart for those groups and individuals who reject poll techniques and sociological surveys in general as being part of the "dominant order." The other is that people will certainly pay

little attention to the questions in the case of face-to-face interviews, since they are engaged at the same time in a collective action, surrounded by colleagues, friends, relatives and the whole crowd.

Additionally, the filling in of questionnaires can become a collective action, and the pressure to adhere to group values is strong. These problems of validity can be considered in designing the questionnaire (avoiding long and complex questions, keeping the completion time low, focusing on actual behaviors) as well as, of course, in the interpretation of the data. Both in face-to-face interviews and in the case of questionnaires to be filled out at home and returned by mail, the role of the interviewer is fundamental. In both cases, interviewers may actually select respondents in a non-random way: “experiments where interviewers could select their own respondents indicate that interviewers are inclined to talk to the more approachable respondents” (van Stekelenburg et al. 2012, 258). This is why the distinction between “who selects” and “who interviews” is so important, as suggested earlier.

Besides the selection problem, the way in which the interviewer conducts a face-to-face interview or motivates respondents to accept the questionnaire may have a great impact on the validity of the data and on the questionnaire’s return rate. As reported by Groves et al. (2009, 291), interviewers “elicit the cooperation of sample respondents,” “help respondents to perform their roles in the interview interaction,” “manage the question-and-answer process, asking a set of questions, then asking follow-up questions or probes when respondents fail to answer a question completely,” and “record the answers that are provided.”

In the case of protest surveys, the chaotic context, the group pressure, and the very fact that the interview is often conducted while walking make the interviewer role harder to perform. This is why much attention, time, and energy should be paid to the selection and training of interviewers. Our suggestion is to select interviewers among graduate or PhD students with experience in interviewing and in protest participation. They should be prepared in one or more training sessions in which they can learn how to approach respondents, present themselves and the research question, motivate respondents, avoid having respondents discuss the content of the interview with colleagues, friends, comrades or others (questions, answers, meaning), clarify questions respondents do not understand, and help them if they have difficulty understanding how answers should be given.

In the field, it is also advisable that the more expert members of the research group (usually the pointers) supervise how the interviewers approach and interview respondents, taking notes on possible errors, malpractice, or misconduct. The collection of this information will be very useful for future training sessions. At the end of the fieldwork, it is also important to collect reactions and observations from both interviewers and pointers on possible problems that occurred during the entire process of interviewing and/or questionnaire distribution.

How to use Data from Surveys

Once the fieldwork is done, the data from the survey should be collected and imputed in a statistical software (such as Stata, SPSS, or similar). If the research strategy was based on questionnaires filled out at home and returned by mail, a time limit should be set which allows latecomer respondents to be included. From our experience, the time span for questionnaire returns does not exceed three months.

Once all the questionnaires are returned, data are inputted in a matrix. There is a lot of literature on the problems related to data codification and imputation, which is not possible to discuss in detail here (Groves et al. 2009, chapter 10). In short, when questions are pre-codified with some type of closure, the imputation process is much easier; it is sufficient that imputers are trained before they perform their task and followed in the first questionnaire imputation by a senior or experienced researcher. Post-imputation controls are also important. When, instead, questions are open, it is advisable to instruct imputers to insert in the matrix the exact wording of the responses. When translation is needed, it is best to instruct the imputers to use a word-to-word method (see the section headed 'How to Design a Questionnaire'). If open questions need to be transformed into nominal variables, the post-codification process implies more time and energy in training and supervision.

Once the data are imputed, researchers start their analysis by checking whether their findings are in line with (which of) the hypotheses discussed in the literature and/or with their (theoretically motivated) expectations about their new research questions. For instance, while in the Demos project our central interest focused on conceptions and practices of democracy, we drafted the questionnaire to include other relevant aspects that needed to be investigated, as we expected them to have some impact on conceptions and practices of democracy at the individual level.

Data analysis usually starts with some descriptive frequencies on the sampled population. First, surveys contribute useful information on the social backgrounds of the activists. Political participation has been said to be selective, with larger involvement of the central groups in the population. The extent to which this is also true of participation in social movement activities is an open question. In the case of our ESF interviewees, men were overrepresented: 54.9 percent, versus 45.1 percent women. However, this difference in the overall sample was related to the overrepresentation of men in some specific countries—with more balanced gender participation for activists from France (47.4 percent women) and Spain (47 percent) and an even larger presence of women in other national sub-samples (see Germany, where women constitute 54.5 percent), versus others with male over-representation (especially among Italians and Belgians, with 62.4 percent and 59 percent men, respectively). As far as

age is concerned, those under 30 represented 47.3 percent of the sample; those between 30 and 44, 22.4 percent; and both those between 45 and 53 and more than 53, about 15 percent. Not surprisingly, the average level of education was very high, with about 55 percent of the respondents being graduates or post-graduates and only 7 percent having just accomplished the compulsory level. Finally, as many as 38 percent were students, 6 percent unemployed, 7 percent retired, and 50 percent part of the working population (Andretta and Sommier 2009, 116).

A second important set of questions referred to the political background of participants, their values, and previous experiences. The process of participation requires the construction of solidarity communities within which individuals perceive themselves and are recognized as equals (Pizzorno 1966). Identification, as awareness of being part of a collective, facilitates political participation. Our sample had, for instance, high variance on participation in GJM events: only about one-fifth were first-timers and another 11 percent had participated only once, while about one-third had participated between two and five times and as many as 40 percent more than five times.

Attitudes, norms, and framing are all relevant cultural aspects of the surveyed group. As for the ESF, we noticed, for instance, that few activists declared trusting national government and parliaments (12 and 20 percent, respectively), a little more local institutions (27 percent); while political parties had the support of just 21 percent of our respondents, as many as 49 percent expressed trust in trade unions, and 86 percent in social movements. It was interesting to note that activists appreciated the judiciary (about 34 percent) more than any other institution. Given the nature of the event surveyed, one part of the questionnaire focused on how respondents framed the European Union and its function in the broader globalization process. The EU was trusted by only 15 percent of the respondents: as many as 88 percent declared agreement (some or very much) with the statement “the European Union strengthens neo-liberal globalization,” only 19 percent with “the European Union mitigates the most negative effects of neo-liberal globalization,” and even fewer (10 percent) with “the European Union attempts to safeguard a social model that is different from the neo-liberal one” (della Porta and Giugni 2009, 89–92).

As mentioned, beyond contributing to these debates, by surveying participants at the ESFs held in Athens in 2006, we wanted to investigate what types of democratic norms the activists held. An important step in the analysis thus involved the calculation of the frequencies of the chosen indicators for democratic norms. Further, crossing the indicators of participatory versus representative norms with the one identifying consensual versus majoritarian visions, we constructed a typology with four values: associational model, when a preference for representation combined with majoritarian visions; assembly, when

Table 13.2 Typology of Democratic Norms (Percent of Preferences for Each Type)

Participation		High	Low
Consensus	Low	Associational model 19.1	Assembleary model 35.9
	High	Deliberative representation 8.2	Deliberative participation 36.7

Source: Andretta and della Porta 2009, 72.

preferences were expressed towards participation and majority voting; deliberative representation, when representation combined with consensus; and deliberative participation, when the preference was for participation and consensus (see Table 13.2). In the sample, the rate of support for associational models of democracy was quite low, with one-fifth of our population ($N = 1,055$), and the percentage for the deliberative-representative model reached only 8.2 percent. From a normative point of view, indeed, the ESF participants were attracted by either assembleary or deliberative-participative models (about one-third each), even if about 24 percent of respondents declared a preference for either the associational or the deliberative representative model.

After descriptive analysis, correlations often offer initial explanations about the impact of specific independent variables on the phenomenon we want to explain. For instance, by crossing democratic norms (as defined earlier) with degree of activism in the global justice movement, we could observe that activists who were more involved in GJM activities and identified more with the movement were expected to hold the democratic views supported by the movement as a whole, namely either a deliberative participation or an assembleary model.

First-timers were less likely to emphasize consensus, while those with more previous experiences of participation stressed both consensus and participation (Table 13.3). On the other hand, identification with the GJM has also been found correlated with activists' democratic views, as the least identified supported less consensus and participation (Table 13.4). Identification was in turn correlated with participation in GJM events: the means of participation figure was 2.3 for those with little or no identification with the GJM and about 6.0 for the highly identified activists ($ETA = 0.265$, significant at 0.001 level). Put another way, only 54 percent of the non-identified, but as many as 84 percent of the identified activists declared having participated in GJM events at least once before the ESF in Athens; and 27.3 percent of the former, as compared to 54 percent of the latter, had done so at the transnational level (outside their own country).

Overall, the data reported here suggest that at the time of our research, a complex mechanism of identity formation was operating at the transnational

Table 13.3 Respondents' Democratic Norms and Participation in GJM Events

Normative models of democracy	Participation in other GJM events before Athens			Total (100%)
	Never before	2–5 times	More than 5 times	
Associational	25.2	36.6	38.1	202
Deliberative representative	15.1	43.0	41.9	86
Assembleary	21.3	45.6	33.1	375
Deliberative participative	14.6	37.8	47.7	384
Total row %	19.1	40.8	40.1	1047
Measures of association	Cramer's V = .11***			

Source: Andretta and della Porta 2009, 75.

Table 13.4 Respondents' Democratic Ideals and Identification with GJM

Normative models of democracy	Identification with GJM			Total (100%)
	No or little	Enough	Much	
Associational	21.0	43.0	36.0	200
Deliberative representative	12.8	57.0	30.2	86
Assembleary	13.7	48.8	37.5	371
Deliberative participative	9.1	49.1	41.8	383
Total row %	13.4	48.5	38.2	1040
Measures of association	Cramer's V = .10**			

Source: Andretta and della Porta 2009, 75.

level, which brought about a diffusion of new democratic norms among social movement activists and organizations. The interactions at the organizational level for the formation of broad networks for transnational mobilization attracted the participation of many activists, who came to identify increasingly with the new democratic ideals of consensus-based and participated decision making.

This illustration shows how surveying participants in protest events can help researchers to link different levels of analyses by exploring new issues, while not neglecting "old" ones. Clear research questions, careful drafting of the questions based on theoretical arguments, attention paid to the research field, the sampling strategy, and the procedure of selecting, interviewing, and distributing questionnaires to respondents, as well as careful control of the coding and imputation process, brought about good results even without sophisticated statistical analyses. The triangulation of data collected by surveys with other more qualitative data improved the contextualization of the analysis at the micro level.

Surveying Protestors: Pro and Con(clusions)

In this chapter, we presented a quite innovative method in social movement research, which surveys participants in protest events. Survey research at the individual level has a long tradition in political participation research, especially in the political science field, but has long been neglected in social movement studies. Moreover, while surveys of the general population have produced relevant findings on the spreading of a protest repertoire among citizens of democratic countries—as well as on the social barriers that enabled some individuals to politically participate while impeding others—they lack the ability to contextualize their findings by aggregating very heterogeneous participants in the same category. Additionally, the design of the items relating to political participation, as well as the (often) low *n* of individuals declaring their participation in protest, jeopardized efforts to better investigate significant variations in the patterns and intensity of protest participation.

Only recently have social movement studies ended the “strange lacuna” in the use of surveys of protestors, beginning to better link the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of analysis and improve the generalization of findings based on the individual level. As suggested and reported, surveying protestors helps in bridging this gap among levels of analysis; the empirical research based on this method has produced and continues to produce relevant results.

There are, however, some caveats that need to be addressed. If the quality of the data collected can be improved by paying accurate attention to the sampling procedure and the design of the questionnaire, some challenges remain.

While a researcher can try to maximize the representativeness, the question of what population the sample happens to represent still remains. It may represent the specific population that mobilized in that demonstration, on that day, in that city, but surely not all the population who protest, nor all the population who protest for that specific issue, nor the population that composes a specific social movement.

Additionally, surveys can be used to answer a specific set of theoretical questions, and cannot answer others: they are, to cite but one example, not the best way to analyze either concrete organizational praxis or organizational values (Dryzek 2004). Thus, they must be used with care (and possibly triangulated with other, more qualitative techniques) when we want to study values or motivations in depth. Even when careful attention is paid to the sampling strategy and the design of the questionnaire, as suggested in this chapter, in fact, the very instrument of the survey discourages the active participation of interviewee and interviewer, reducing creativity and flexibility in the search for homogeneity and standardization. Besides the difficulty in assessing the influence of the interviewees’ attempts to provide “socially desirable answers or rationalisation,” surveys tend to produce superficial or very standardized responses: “feelings and emotions, people’s uncertainties,

doubts, and fears, all the inconsistencies and the complexities of social interactions and belief systems are matters that are not easily tapped with survey questionnaires” (Klandermans and Smith 2002, 27). However, as the example of the Demos project points out, researchers interested in new topics or theoretical questions can find a compromise between the need for standardization of quantitative analysis and the effort to create new indicators and explanations by combining surveys with other, more qualitative methods.

Before concluding, a few words need to be said about the reporting style and publishing outcomes linked with such a quantitative methodology. As gathering data by surveying protestors at demonstrations often implies the investment of many human resources, fundraising through networked teams can be required. Reporting the results of this kind of analysis is therefore often a collective endeavor in which the coordination effort is high, and the reporting generally characterized by co-authorship. The use of data collected by networks of teams is normally subject to rules for publication, which are set in advance by the consortium. The analysis is associated with a “structured” narrative style, in which the language of dependent and independent variables prevails and the resulting story is characterized by sobriety and synthesis. Consequently, the most common types of publication are journal articles (often co-authored) or chapters in edited books. This is, however, not always the case, especially when survey data are triangulated with qualitative analysis. In these cases, contamination of reporting styles and differentiation of publication strategies and outcomes may produce innovative richness.

Indeed, most of the studies reported in this chapter have applied a triangulation of methods; it is highly recommended that social movement researchers continue to encourage the pluralist “soul” of this important research tradition.

■ NOTES

1. Partners of this project were, in addition to Donatella della Porta for the EUI, Christopher Rootes for the University of Kent, Dieter Rucht for the WZB, Mario Pianta for the University of Urbino, Isabelle Sommier for the Centre de recherches politiques de la Sorbonne, Manuel Jiménez for the Instituto de estudios sociales de Andalucía, and Marco Giugni of the University of Geneva. More information and documents on the project can be found at <<http://cosmos.eui.eu/>> (accessed April 1, 2014).
2. The partners of this project are: Stefaan Walgrave, Joris Verhuls, Jeroen van Laer, and Ruud Wouters for Belgium; Donatella della Porta for Italy; José Manuel Sabucedo, Eva Andaiza, Camilo Cristancho, Christina Gomez, and Mauro Rodriguez for Spain; Abby Peterson, Magnus Wennerhag, and Mattias Wahlstrom for Sweden; Marco Giugni and Nina Eggert for Switzerland; Bert Klandermans, Jaqueliën von Stakelenburg, Dunya van Troost, and Anouk van Leeuwen for The Netherlands; Clare Saunders, Chris Rootes, Maria Grasso, and Emily Rainsford for the United Kingdom; and John McCarthy, Lester Kurtz, Alex Vitale, and David Snow for the United States. More information and documents for this project can be found at <<http://www.protestsurvey.eu>> (accessed April 1, 2014).

3. Since the figures were used for logistical purposes (such as finding lodging for the incoming activists), they were expected to be quite reliable.

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14 Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring

Swen Hutter

Introducing a Key Innovation of Social Movement Research

Protest event analysis (PEA) has become a key method of social movement research over the past decades. Oliver et al. (2003) even list the increasing use of PEA among the top four emerging trends in social movement research. The authors describe these trends as “transcending old categories and boundaries” and combining “methodological and theoretical advances” (Oliver et al. 2003, 214). The method gained ground in the 1980s and early 1990s, as Crist and McCarthy’s (1996) review article on the methodological repertoires in social movement research highlights. In contrast to most other methods presented in the present volume, PEA is a key methodological innovation that emerged within the social movement field itself, and has more recently been adapted and refined to study other research topics.

Researchers rely on PEA, as a type of *content analysis*, to systematically assess the amount and features of protests across various geographical areas (from the local level up to the supranational level) and over time (from short periods of time up to several decades). Usually, social movement scholars use newspaper articles as their textual sources, but the range of sources has expanded over time and covers, amongst other things, police reports and information provided by new digital media. In his comprehensive introduction to content analysis, Krippendorff (2004, 18) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” Thus, this chapter introduces a specific *technique* and attempts to provide some practical guidelines for researchers who want to conduct a PEA.

We can certainly question the neat distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis since, “[u]ltimately, all reading of texts is qualitative, even when certain characteristics of a text are later converted into numbers” (Krippendorff 2004, 16). I will emphasize the interpretative work involved in any PEA, but the ultimate goal of the techniques described in this

chapter is still to transform “words to numbers” (Franzosi 2004), which then can be analyzed with the help of various statistical tools. To a certain degree, this implies a quantitative approach, but it is significant to note that PEA can be combined with various other techniques, and the data generated with its help can be combined within different research designs (on the two understandings of methods, see Wagemann 2014).

In theoretical terms, PEA has been used largely to test and refine arguments related to the political process approach. In the words of Klandermans and Staggenborg (2002, xi f.), “Political process theory offered an innovative method: protest event analysis provided a way of measuring the effects of political opportunities in comparative designs.” More specifically, researchers turned to protest event data because of its *cross-national*, *cross-time*, and/or *cross-issue comparative character*. For example, PEA has provided answers to questions such as how national political contexts influence the levels of protest mobilization or action repertoires. At the same time, the longitudinal nature of the data has allowed us to disentangle protest waves, as well as to see how protests co-vary with changes in their environment (e.g., government participation of allies, changes in the economy), or with supposed movement outcomes (e.g., decisions by parliaments, state expenditures). Moreover, PEA has been used to study how various characteristics of protest vary across issue areas.

PROTEST EVENT ANALYSIS

- PEA is a type of (quantitative) content analysis.
- PEA turns words into numbers.
- PEA allows for the mapping of the occurrences and characteristics of protests across geographical areas, across issues/movements, and over time.
- PEA is closely linked to the political process approach.

This chapter builds on earlier introductions to PEA—most importantly, those by Rucht and Neidhardt (1998), as well as by Koopmans and Rucht (2002). I summarize and update this work by introducing recent developments in the field, and I formulate key questions that need to be answered by those who want to conduct a PEA. Specifically, this chapter is structured as follows. The next section presents some main PEA-based research projects. The following two sections focus more closely on the “how-to-do” questions, moving from data collection to data analysis. The main focus of the chapter is on aspects of data collection (i.e., on unitizing, sampling, and coding). I only briefly discuss different strategies of data analysis.

Four Generations of Protest Event Research: An Overview

In this section, I highlight the wide range of questions that can be addressed by protest event data and its offspring. Furthermore, I strongly encourage anyone interested in conducting a PEA to look at the coding manuals and data of earlier projects. This helps us to see the main decisions and dilemmas of any PEA, and it may increase the comparability across datasets. Many of the existing datasets offer valuable sources for secondary analysis and the possibility of extending the data at hand.

PEA, as a form of content analysis, has several advantages: it is an unobtrusive technique, it can handle unstructured matter as data, it is context-sensitive, and it can cope with large volumes of data (see Krippendorff 2004, 40ff.). The ability to move beyond a few cases and illustrative examples is also what made PEA so attractive to social movement scholars. As Koopmans and Rucht (2002, 252) state, “PEA provides a solid ground in an area that is still often marked more by more or less informed speculation.” Since early work in the 1960s and 1970s, we observe “a virtual industry of protest event data analysis” (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002, xii). In bold strokes, one can identify four generations of PEA research (on the development of PEA research, see also Rucht et al. 1998; Koopmans and Rucht 2002, 232ff.; Tilly 2008, 19ff; Davenport 2009, 25ff.).

The first generation—“the initiators,” as Rucht et al. (1998, 10) call them—consisted of researchers who were interested in various indicators for a large number of countries, or in long-term processes of social and political change. The *Handbook for Social and Political Indicators I & II* by Russett et al. (1967) as well as by Taylor and Hudson (1972) are the most prominent examples for large-n studies. Tilly and his colleagues, by contrast, were interested in the long-term trends of strike activity and political violence (Shorter and Tilly 1974; Tilly et al. 1975). However, the authors paid relatively little attention to “the selectivity of the sources, the creation of fine-grained coding categories, and the development of well-documented rules and procedures” (Koopmans and Rucht 2002, 232). This led to the first methodological debates over the selectivity of newspaper reports (see the interesting debate between Danziger 1975 and Snyder and Kelly 1977).

Inspired by this research, a second generation developed, which made more extensive use of protest data. This research broke down the data according to various analytical criteria, which was possible as the categories used for the data collection were far more sophisticated. Ground-breaking studies were Jenkins and Perrow’s (1977) work on farmers’ mobilization, Kriesi et al.’s (1981) study on political activation events in Switzerland, McAdam’s (1982) case study on civil rights protests in the

United States, and Tarrow's (1989) study on the Italian protest cycle from 1965 to 1974. These studies focused largely on the emergence and development of social movements that were the result of "expanding opportunities." Furthermore, a major innovation within this generation were cross-national designs, such as the one used by Kriesi et al. (1995) in their four-country study of new social movements' mobilization. These projects focused more on the stable elements of the political context to explain differing mobilization levels and action repertoires (on environmental protest, see also Rootes 2003).

Though the second generation was sophisticated with respect to coding procedures and source selection, the authors did not invest a lot of time in qualifying the bias of their sources. Thus, a third generation assessed the bias of newspaper data more systematically. Most importantly, authors focused on the selection bias; that is, the fact that newspapers *selectively* report on protest events, and do not provide a representative sample of all events taking place (for reviews, see Davenport 2009: 25ff.; Earl et al. 2004; Ortiz et al. 2005).¹ Furthermore, among the third generation were those who tried to be more efficient by using electronic approaches to select (and even code) protest events. Most prominent examples of half-automated procedures are (a) the *European protest and coercion data* (EPCD) collected by Francisco et al. (e.g., Francisco 1996; Nam 2006, 2007; Reising 1998, 1999); (b) Imig and Tarrow's (2001) study on European protest events; and (c) Jenkins et al.'s project for a new edition of the *Handbook for Social and Political Indicators* (see <<https://sociology.osu.edu/worldhandbook>>). All these projects are based on adapted versions of KEDS, the Kansas Event Data System software, to identify relevant protest events. Unfortunately, these projects tend to fall back on the first generation of research when it comes to the selection of sources and coding procedures and/or their value for comparative research (Imig 2001, 256f.). More modest attempts to speed up the selection process are simple key word searches in electronic archives (see, e.g., Maney and Oliver 2001; Strawn 2010).

Finally, there is a fourth generation that has developed since the late 1990s. Authors have moved beyond PEA by abandoning the strict focus on (aggregates of) protest events as their coding unit. On the one hand, scholars unpacked single protest events or contentious performances by focusing on action and interaction inside them (e.g., McPhail and Schweingruber 1998; Franzosi 2004; Tilly 2008). On the other hand, scholars broadened the unit of analysis beyond protest to cover a larger group of public claims making (including protest events) (e.g., Koopmans and Statham 1999, 2010a; Koopmans et al. 2005; Kriesi et al. 2012). The two approaches within the fourth generation clearly differ from each other. However, both attempt to capture the relational aspect of political contention better than traditional PEA, and their coding

units share a very similar structure; that is, subject–relation–object (see the next section, “Data Collection: Small Quantities, Big Impacts”).

This short history of PEA research should emphasize (a) the broad range of questions that can be addressed with the help of this technique; (b) how the coding unit has been expanded recently; and (c) the considerable efforts devoted to evaluating the validity and reliability of the data. As Tilly (2002, 249) has emphasized in his essay on “event catalogues as theories,” scholars are interested in both “a theory embodying explanation of the phenomenon under investigation, and another theory embodying explanations of the evidence concerning that phenomenon.” However, in Mueller’s (1997) terms, there is both a “*representational*” approach and a “*media theory*” approach to how scholars have addressed the selection bias question. The former approach accepts the selectivity of its sources but tries to hold it constant. The latter approach is more interested in precisely examining sources of media selection bias (this is what most of the cited selection bias studies do) and, eventually, incorporates these findings in general theories of protest. Davenport’s (2009) recent study on the Black Panther Party is a good example of the last point. He explicitly selects sources with different bias structures to get closer to an understanding of the conflict dynamics at play. To a certain degree, members of the fourth generation of PEA research represent yet another “*public debate*” approach to the selection bias question. In this case, mass-mediated communication, or who enters the public debate in what way, is actually the key focus of the analysis.

I will come back to the selection bias discussion in the next section, but readers who plan their own PEA could already answer the following questions. What type of research question does the proposed project address? Which existing research comes closest? What is the approach to the selection bias usually adopted by these studies? To help newcomers in the field, Table 14.1 lists major projects that offer information on data collection, and shows where the data itself is published in public archives or on websites. Free-and-easy-access to existing datasets and codebooks is very helpful, since it provides important information when you plan your own project (e.g., by exemplary coding instructions). Moreover, most of these projects have not been designed to answer only a very specific research question. By contrast, these datasets are designed for secondary analysis and can be used to address a broad range of questions. In addition, some differences between the projects are not as easy to see from the published work alone, even though small changes in the data collection may lead to quite pronounced differences in the final data (for details, see the next section, “Data Collection: Small Questions, Big Impacts”). As Earl et al. (2004, 71) state in their review article, often “differences in coding criteria and procedures may account for some of what appears to be selection bias.”

Table 14.1 Selected List of Publicly Available Protest Event Datasets¹⁰

Name	Geographical scope	Time period	Coding unit	Issues covered	Sources	Homepage
<i>Political Activation in Switzerland, 1945–1978</i> by Kriesi et al. (1981)	Switzerland	1945–79	Political activation events	All issues	Several newspapers and other sources	< http://forscenter.ch/ >
<i>New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis (NSM)</i> by Kriesi et al. (1995)	France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands	1975–89	Protest event	All issues	One national newspaper per country	< http://www.unil.ch/fors >
National Political Change in a Globalizing World by Kriesi et al.	NSM update plus Austria, and the United Kingdom	1975–2005; 2004–06	Protest event; core sentence	All issues; immigration, Europe, eco. liberalization	One national newspaper per country	< http://www.ipz.uzh.ch/forschung/npw.html > (PEA not yet available; currently updated to 2011)
<i>Prodat—Protest in Germany</i> (main project) by Rucht et al. (1992)	Germany	1950–2002	Protest event	All issues	Two national newspapers	< http://www.wzb.eu >
<i>European Protest and Coercion Data</i> by Francisco et al.	29 European countries (plus 4 Latin American countries)	1980–95	Protest event	All issues	Reuters plus additional national newspapers	< http://web.ku.edu/~ronfrand/data/ >
<i>Dynamics of Collective Action</i> by McAdam et al.	United States	1960–95	Protest event	All issues	One national newspaper	< http://www.stanford.edu/group/collectiveaction >
<i>Mass Demonstrations and Mass Violent Events in the Former USSR</i> by Beissinger	Former USSR	1987–92	Mass demonstration; mass violent event	All issues	Several international and national newspapers and publications	< http://www.princeton.edu/~mbeissin >
Black Panther Party, Authority Event Catalogue by Davenport	United States (Bay Area)	1967–73	Broad definition of BPP and authority events	All issues (by and directed to BPP)	Five newspapers	< http://www.christiandavenport.com >
<i>The Transformation of Political Mobilization and Communication in European Public Spheres</i> by Koopmans et al.	France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom	1990, 1995, 2000–02	Political claim	Seven issue areas	Several newspapers per country	< http://europub.wzb.eu/ >

Data Collection: Small Questions, Big Impacts

Let us now focus more closely on the different steps and decisions that are involved when you want to design your own study. More specifically, this section focuses on the data collection phase by breaking it down into three steps: unitizing, sampling, and coding. In this part, I want to underscore Mark Beissinger's statement,

While certain common practices have emerged to ensure methodological rigor, the method has been operationalized differently in practically every case of its use. Standardization of categories, definitions, and approaches across objects of analysis has remained elusive, and for good reason. The advantage of the method has precisely been its adaptability to a wide variety of circumstances, depending on the researcher's purposes. . . . Researchers must ultimately make decisions about which forms of action deserve to be analyzed, what features of those actions are worthy of attention, what sources should be used to gain information about these events, and how one should organize the process of recording this information. In a well-formulated study, both theory and context must interact to inform these choices (Beissinger 2002, 460f.).

All questions related to the data collection should be taken with respect to your research question, but you should not lose sight of more pragmatic considerations, since PEA and its offspring are very resource-intensive techniques. This is illustrated by two examples from our research on national political change in a globalizing world (NPW) (see Kriesi et al. 2012; Hutter 2014). It took around five, full-time, working months to update the French protest data of Kriesi et al. (1995) for the years 1990 to 2005 ($n = 2,975$ events)—although we relied on electronic key word searches and adopted a “minimalist” strategy of data collection; that is, we selected only the Monday editions of *Le Monde*. Similarly, we spent around two months of full-time work for the selection and coding of a debate on a single issue (e.g., immigration) in one country (selecting and coding approximately 300 articles from one quality newspaper; $n = 2,000$ core sentences).

Because of the high workload of manual content analysis, I encourage all researchers to follow Krippendorff's (2004, xxii) advice, “Beginners in content analysis are advised to start with a small pilot project, to get a feel for what is involved in conducting a larger study. . . . Beginning researchers will soon realize that analyzing text is not a mechanical task, and neither is designing a content analysis. Both undertakings require creativity and competence.” Such a small pilot study or pre-test can save a lot of time (and other resources), especially because changing direction during a large-scale coding enterprise involves a lot of additional work—even if you simply want to change the categories used to code a single variable.

WHAT IS YOUR MAIN CODING UNIT? ZOOMING IN AND OUT OF PROTEST EVENTS

A very crucial step is the definition of the coding units, that is, “units that are distinguished for separate description, transcription, recording, or coding” (Krippendorff 2004, 99). To put it simply, most research in the first three PEA generations focuses on a fairly similar list of activities as coding units, which are usually labeled as “protest events.” The list typically covers activities from the collections of signatures, to public rallies and mass demonstrations, and to more confrontational activities (e.g., blockades and occupations), as well as violent ones (e.g., physical attacks and arson). The list reflects the modern “repertoire of contention,” whose development in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Tilly (1976, 1995, 2008) traced in his ground-breaking studies. Furthermore, the list resembles the standard survey questions that are used to measure “unconventional” political participation (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Teorell et al. 2007). By contrast, the fourth PEA generation either extends the type of coding units to cover a broader set of activities or it attempts to disentangle single activities covered by the traditional approach. In these cases, the coding units are no longer protest events but, for example, “political claims,” “core sentences,” or “semantic triplets.”

Compared to the latest advances, it seems justified to argue that traditional PEA-based projects focus on a very similar coding unit. However, if we look more closely at the projects, we realize what Beissinger referred to. I illustrate this with four examples. *First*, Tilly and his collaborators’ work focused on contentious gatherings, defined as “occasions in which ten or more persons outside the government gather in the same place and make a visible claim which, if realized, would affect the interests of some specific person(s) or group(s) outside their own number” (Tilly and Schweitzer 1977, 14). *Second*, the German Prodat project defines a protest event as “a collective, public action by a non-governmental actor who expresses criticism or dissent and articulates a societal or political demand” (Rucht et al. 1992, 4). *Third*, Kriesi et al. (1995) explicitly refrain from a precise definition of a protest event, but use an operational approach by relying on a detailed list of specific action forms.² At the same time, Kriesi et al. do not specify a minimum number of participants. *Finally*, Beissinger’s (2002) study on the former USSR is restricted to demonstrations (with a minimum number of 100 participants) and events of mass violence (i.e., events whose main purpose is to cause violence and which involve a minimum number of fifteen participants). As can be seen, the two key differences are (a) the action forms covered; and (b) the minimum number of participants. Tilly and Schweitzer (1977) and Beissinger (2002) clearly refer to activities where a group of people physically meet at a certain place, whereas Prodat and Kriesi et al. do not restrict their analysis to such forms, but also include the collection of signatures.

I agree with Beissinger that a key source of the differences is the differing research purpose. For example, he justifies the use of a narrow coding unit by stating, “Ideally, in this study information on other acts of contention . . . should have been collected to obtain a more complete picture of how protest repertoires evolved over time. However, given the sheer number of these events and the fact that the focus of this analysis is not protest repertoires per se but rather nationalism, there were good theoretical and practical justifications for omitting them” (Beissinger 2002, 461). At the same time, I think that the differences also mirror the general problem that protest is in itself not easy to define. As Rucht et al. (1998, 9) emphasize, “unlike other forms of social and political activities, e.g., electoral behavior, protest is by its very nature a complex phenomenon.” In a recent review, Opp (2009, 33ff.) again highlights the concept’s ambiguity and definitional differences. To avoid conceptually imprecise concepts, Opp (2009, 38) presents a broad definition of protest, “as joint (i.e., collective) action of individuals aimed at achieving their goal or goals by influencing decisions of a target.”

In theoretical terms, such a broad definition might be beneficial. However, we need more precise guidelines for a PEA. In other words, consider carefully what type of evidence is needed to answer your research question, and what costs would be involved in extending the coding units. To illustrate this point, I calculated the differences between the four approaches based on the updated Kriesi et al. data and Prodat. Only 3.5 percent of all coded events in the Kriesi et al. data refer to the collection of signatures, but these events account for 17.6 percent of all reported participants. By contrast, demonstrations/public marches account for 47.0 percent of all events and 65.9 percent of all participants, respectively ($n = 19,182$). Moreover, the updated Kriesi et al. data covers only 2.9 percent of events, with fewer than three reported participants, but this figure increases to 13.9 percent with less than ten participants ($n = 14,905$ events with a reported number of participants). Similarly, 12.8 percent of all demonstrations/protest meetings, for which a number of participants was provided in the newspaper, involved not more than 100 participants (no participant figures were reported for around the same share of events). Finally, excluding the action forms not covered by Kriesi et al. from the Prodat data decreases the number of events covered in the period 1950 to 2002 by 35.1 percent ($n = 15,973$)—strikes account for around one-third of all dropped events.

Of course, whether these numerical differences really matter for your research depends on the questions you are asking and, to a large extent, on the aggregation level of the analyses (see the later section, “A Final Note on Data Analysis”). For example, if we take the updated Kriesi et al. data to compare mobilization levels in the period 1990 to 2005, it makes a difference whether collections of signatures are included or not. As Figure 14.1 shows, the values based on all forms of action indicate some country differences that

are no longer observed when excluding such activities. At the same time, if we look at the smaller sample of the Prodat data (being more comparable to the Kriesi et al. strategy), we can tell the same story about the major waves of protest in Germany ($r = 0.98$ and 0.92 , based on yearly numbers of participants and events, respectively) (see Hutter and Teune 2012). However, if we base the analysis on demonstrations/marches alone, we get similar results only for France, Austria, Britain, and Germany ($r = 0.96$ to 0.86), whereas this is not the case for the Netherlands and Switzerland ($r = 0.56$ and 0.39). However, it might be that you are explicitly interested in more contentious forms of action and, therefore, you actually want a view on the Swiss “protest landscape” that is not influenced by a few, very moderate collections of signatures (see, e.g., Hutter and Giugni 2009, 409).

Figure 14.1 presents the number of participants divided by the number of inhabitants. I believe this is the best indicator for cross-national comparisons in the mobilization levels. While the number of coded protest events is also a very good indicator with which to trace changes over time within a given country, comparing numbers of events across countries is more difficult. In the case of events, not only the size of the country accounts for differences, but the newspapers selected vary also with respect to the number of pages and articles in general, and therefore in their coverage of protests or any other

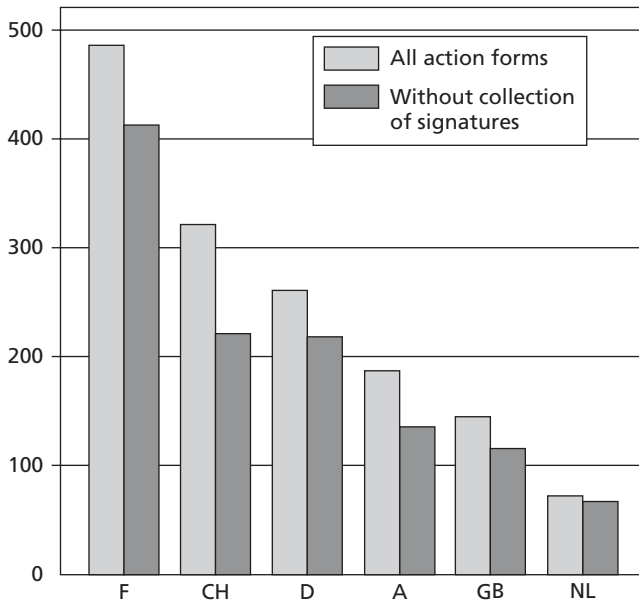


Figure 14.1 Protest Participants Per Million Inhabitants, 1990–2005 (in thousands)

Note: The absolute number of participants is divided by the number of inhabitants in the year 2000.

events. Standardizing the number of events by the number of inhabitants, I think, is therefore a less useful strategy (but see Beissinger and Sasse 2012).

The fourth PEA generation has shifted from protest events to alternative coding units. As stated, some authors have collected data on a far broader set of coding units (including protest events), others have chosen to focus more closely on the dynamics within single events or contentious performances. Koopmans and Statham's (1999) political claim analysis (PCA), as well as Kriesi et al.'s (2012) core-sentence analysis (CSA) exemplify the first approach, whereas the work of Franzosi (2004) and Tilly (2008) exemplifies the second. The two approaches clearly differ from each other. However, both attempt to capture the relational aspect of political contention better than traditional PEA. This is reflected in the very similar basic structure of their coding units: *subject–relation–object*. In the following, I illustrate the two approaches by briefly discussing PCA and Tilly's latest work.

Koopmans and Statham (1999) introduce PCA as a way to move beyond “protest-centric” PEA for measuring political contention, and as a way to systematically link protest events with relevant covariates. The new coding unit is an instance of claim making (a claim) and is defined as follows: “A political claim-making act is a purposeful communicative action in the public sphere. Claim-making acts consist of public speech acts (including protest events) that articulate political demands, calls to action, proposals, or criticism, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants or other collective actors” (Koopmans and Statham 2010b, 55). An “ideal-typical claim” involves the following grammar sequence: “an actor, the claimant, undertakes some sort of action in the public sphere to get another actor, the addressee, to do or leave something that affects the interests of a third actor, the object, and provides justification for why this should be done” (Koopmans and Statham 2010b, 55). By means of PCA, one can analyze the broader public debate. To give just two examples, PCA allows Koopmans et al. (2005, chapter 5) to study the differing action repertoire of the radical right in four European countries: the share of protest events ranges from around 80 percent (Germany) to around 16 percent (France). A key finding of the Europub project listed in Table 14.1 is that the visibility of social movement organizations (SMOs) and other civil society actors in public debates varies across issues (they are most disadvantaged in highly Europeanized issue areas) (della Porta and Caiani 2009, chapter 2; Koopmans 2010).

In his book *Contentious Performances*, Tilly (2008) criticizes conventional event catalogues because these do not allow us to look inside individual episodes to uncover the more fine-grained actions of, and interactions among, various actors, and because they lack information on how various episodes are linked to each other. Tilly's main methodological suggestion, to address these shortcomings, is the coding of “subject–verb–object” triplets (see also Franzosi 2004; Wada 2004). Empirically, he goes back to the contentious

gatherings data, which he and his colleagues collected for Great Britain from 1758 to 1834. More specifically, he focuses on a variable coded for each contentious gathering ($n = 8,088$), which reports “each distinguishable action by any formation, including the actors(s), the crucial verb, the objects(s) of the action (where applicable), and an excerpt of the text(s). . . (50,875 records)” (Tilly 2008, 36). Around 1,500 different verbs were coded and re-grouped into 46 aggregate categories (e.g., attack, gather, request, or thank). More specifically, Tilly analyzes the clustering of verbs and broad shifts in the verbs over time, as well as subject–object pairs. For example, the analysis of shifts over time highlights the rise of more modular actions at the expense of direct attacks against enemies and wrongdoers. Furthermore, the increasing importance of the parliament in public affairs is seen as both cause and effect of the shift from direct attacks to bargaining and support (Tilly 2008, 49ff.).

Is it worth the effort? It is significant to note that both approaches tend to increase the data collection efforts. In addition, broadening the coding unit may lead to data that includes almost no protest activities and, therefore, makes the analyses of specific features of protests, as well as the co-evolution of protests and its covariates, almost impossible. For example, only 357 (or 1.7 percent) of the claims coded by the Europub project refer to protest activities ($n = 21,299$). While this data allows us to analyze the public claims making and the role of SMOs and NGOs within the broader public debate, it is not very useful to analyze protest activities directed towards European policies and institutions. In addition, I think that both attempts have not yet completely succeeded in carving out the relation between different protests or among protest events and other claims. Often the data analysis is restricted to aggregates of specific variables (e.g., the actors involved in a public debate) or, in Tilly’s approach, the set of activities/verbs covered is too restricted to allow a more fine-grained analysis of how protest activities are embedded in the wider stream of political conflict (for an alternative unit of analysis, see Kriesi 2009).³

However, it is significant to note that these choices do not need to be either/or decisions. For example, in the NPW project, we were interested in the question of how relevant political parties and the electoral arena have been in articulating and mobilizing the new conflicts induced by globalization (initially, the project focused on these political actors and sites of mobilization only; see Kriesi et al. 2008). To get a quantitative and systematic assessment for less institutionalized forms of mobilization, we decided to focus on protest events as our coding unit by extending the Kriesi et al. (1995) data. This allowed us to compare the activities within the electoral arena to what we called the protest arena (see Hutter 2014). However, we all know that political conflicts are not only articulated by political parties within election campaigns or by spectacular protest events. That is why we also analyzed public debates, defined as all communication related to a particular issue,

irrespective of the arena in which it occurs. More specifically, we focused on three central issues related to globalization (i.e., immigration, European integration, and economic liberalization) and broadened our coding unit to so-called core sentences.⁴ By doing so, we were able to identify, amongst other things, the contribution of political arenas to the public debates over globalization. For example, the range of statements linked to the protest arena varied from 12.9 percent in the case of the immigration debate, via 5.6 in the economic liberalization debate, to a mere 0.3 percent in the European integration debate (Helbling et al. 2012, 212).

How to delimit events in time and space. After choosing the range of events covered by your coding unit, “the delimitation of events in time and space has to be decided” (Koopmans and Rucht 2002, 236). This involves the question of the time period and the geographical area to be covered by the data, as well as the delimitation of single events from each other. For example, the NPW project asked the questions of whether and how globalization has given rise to a new cleavage in West European politics. Since we know that globalization, in its different forms, has accelerated since the late 1980s, we chose to study electoral politics and protest politics in the period from the 1970s to the mid-2000s. Since the coding of the three issue-specific debates was very time consuming, we decided to restrict this step to the years 2004 to 2006; that is, to a period when the new integration–demarcation cleavage was expected to have become manifest, which allowed a more detailed analysis of its structure.

As Koopmans and Rucht (2002, 236) emphasize, questions of territorial delimitation need to be carefully addressed in a global age to avoid problems of methodological nationalism (for some suggestion on a “cosmopolitan political science,” see Grande 2006). For example, in a recent study, we were interested in the way the volume of Europeanized protests differs across countries. For this comparative analysis, we selected protest events with “national participants” (either reported individuals or organizations) and protests that took place on the national territory of a given state (which is the standard approach in cross-national PEA). In the case of Germany, this means that 22.6 percent of all Europeanized protests did not take place on German soil. Most of the events that did not take place in Germany but that involved German participants have taken place in Brussels or Strasbourg.

Finally, it is important to have some guidelines on how to delimit a series of events from each other. For example, The European Protest and Coercion project adopts a 24-hour rule. This means that events that last more than 24 hours are introduced as new events. To highlight the impact of such a decision, more than 50 percent of all events in this data set coded for Switzerland are the result of a single squatting event in Zurich (n = 1312). In contrast to this approach, the standard solution is to code the duration of an event as a separate variable, as well as taking the timing and the locality of events as

basic criteria for delimitation. For example, our updated Kriesi et al. data is based on the instruction to treat each action of a series of actions as a single event if we know that they are separated in time (different days or clearly separated periods of one day) and/or space (different cities or clearly separated parts of one city).⁵ Similarly, the US dynamics of collective mobilization project's brief event guide (available on their website) states, "An event is coded as one event if (a) it includes action that is mostly continuous—no gaps of more than 24 hours in time (. . .), (b) it is located within the same city or same part of the city, and (c) it includes the same (or a subset of the same) participants, whose goals are the same."

WHAT ARE YOUR SOURCES? WHAT IS THE SELECTION BIAS OF YOUR SOURCES?

Every PEA also faces the challenge of selecting sampling units; that is, "units that are distinguished for selective inclusion in an analysis" (Krippendorff 2004, 98). For survey research, the sampling unit is usually the same as the coding unit. However, this is typically not the case in PEA research. Furthermore, as Krippendorff (2004, 111) aptly states, "The universe of available texts is too large to be examined as a whole, so content analysts need to limit their research to a manageable body of texts. Although attempting to answer research questions from a limited set of data introduces the specter of sampling bias, it is possible to collect data by means of sampling plans that minimize such bias." This section focuses on the type of sources, the absolute and relative selection bias of newspaper data, as well as half-automated procedures to speed up the selection process (because often the selection of relevant articles is more time consuming than the actual coding).

Mass media content in general, and newspapers more specifically, are still the primary source for PEA. We can select different types of newspapers. The main differences are the geographical focus and the quality press/tabloid distinction. Other mainstream media sources are international news wires (e.g., *Reuters*, *Agence France Press*). More recently, Internet-based sources offer another source for PEA. For example, Almeida and Lichbach (2003) compare activist-based Internet-sources with traditional media outlets, and find that the former report more, and a broader range of, transnational protest events than the latter. In an innovative study, Earl and Kimport (2008) introduce a form of PEA that produces a generalizable sample of online protest activities. Regarding non-media sources, police archives are the most often used type of source (e.g., Fillieule 1996, 1997; Hocke 1998, 2002; McCarthy et al. 1996c; Wisler 1994; Wisler et al. 1996). In some cases, activist archives can also be helpful in collecting data on a specific movement/issue area (e.g., Foltin 2004).

Again, the number and type of sources depend on the research purpose. To be more precise, the selection of sources depends significantly on the geographical level, time period, political context, and issue area covered by a study. Let me illustrate this with our research on the new integration–demarcation cleavage. This research focuses (a) on the national level; (b) on a long period from 1975 to 2005 (usually comparing five-year periods); (c) on a politically stable context; and (d) on all types of issues. In this case, there is no alternative to the study of national newspapers.⁶ However, as Koopmans (1995, 253) aptly states, “It is the poverty of the alternatives that makes newspapers so attractive.” The major advantages of newspapers are access, selectivity, reliability, continuity over time, and ease of coding. Newspapers report on a regular basis, they are kept in public archives, and—at least in the case of quality newspapers—they try to maintain their credibility by covering events accurately. Though police archives have certain advantages over newspapers (e.g., the coverage of smaller events; usually, more structured reports), they are also biased, less comparable (even within a single country), and often contain less information on certain key variables of interest (e.g., the goals of the protestors). As Myers and Schaefer Caniglia (2004, 522) state, “The police data strategy used in recent studies is not much help because it is workable only on a local level. For a national or international study, it would be impossible to locate comparable police records for the hundreds of locations involved.” Similarly, international news wires might be a good source to map broad transformations, such as the rise of Europeanized protests in all EU member states. However, international news wires are not as well suited for cross-national comparisons, since they often neglect protests in smaller countries (Imig 2001, 256f.).

In other contexts, you might, however, want to focus on multiple sources. For example, Beissinger (2002, 476) advocates the use of multiple sources in politically unstable contexts: “although scholars studying protest in advanced industrial societies prefer a single set of newspaper sources available throughout the entire period under study to ensure consistency in coverage, the reality is that in a revolutionary society like Gorbachev’s USSR, this is impossible. In a revolutionary society the best strategy available to a researcher may well be a ‘blanketing’ strategy, utilizing multiple sources and multiple types of information whenever they are available.” As stated earlier, Davenport (2009) presents the use of multiple, biased sources as a general research strategy. While this might be a way to deal with selection bias problems, I think it is most important in exactly the type of context that he studies: the peak of a highly controversial and salient conflict.

Whether you use one or multiple sources, I would suggest relying on a *systematic sampling strategy* across context and over time. For example, the ECPD project by Ron Francisco, or Uba and Ugglá’s (2011) recent study on Europeanized protests, both rely on multiple sources from electronic archives (LEXIS-NEXIS and Factiva). Since not all sources have been electronically

available over the whole research period covered, some changes in the dataset might simply be because of the number of sources and/or the restriction to certain types of languages (in the case of Uba and Ugglå, to English, Spanish, and Swedish).

Any scholar who works with PEA data needs to address the *selection bias* question (no matter what kind of approach she adopts, see section entitled “Four Generations of Protest Event Research”). In the words of Tilly (2002, 249) “anyone who builds [event catalogues] worries unavoidably about problems of selectivity, reliability, verifiability, comparability, bounding, and inclusiveness. If compilers of event catalogs do not worry about these problems, their critics surely will.” Obviously, I cannot summarize the lively and controversial debate over the selection bias of newspaper data in a few paragraphs, but I do want to point to some key findings in this literature. Most importantly, note that researchers continue to disagree on how severe the selection bias is (just compare the reviews of Earl et al. 2004 and Ortiz et al. 2005). However, no researcher would claim that these events are a representative sample of all protest events that take place. The coverage is selective, but what are the main factors that predict whether an event is covered? Knowing this helps in the interpretation of PEA findings. According to Earl et al. (2004), three sets of factors predict selection bias and increase the news value of a given protest event:⁷

- *Event characteristics*: the most important characteristics that increase the likelihood of an event being covered refer to what della Porta and Diani (2006, 171ff.) call the “logic of numbers” and the “logic of damage.” Many studies show that large and violent events are more likely to be reported than small and peaceful ones (e.g., Fillieule 1996; McCarthy et al. 1996c; Hocke 1998, 2002; Barranco and Wisler 1999; Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000; Maney and Oliver 2001; McCarthy et al. 2008). Rucht and Neidhardt (1998, 76) even state, “In the case of very large events, as in cases of violent demonstrations leading to significant damage to property and/or injuries, we can expect a total coverage even when using only one national newspaper.” Other event characteristics, which increase coverage rates, refer to the presence of counterdemonstrators and police forces or sponsorship by formal organizations (e.g., Oliver and Maney 2000; Hocke 2002; Myers and Scafer Caniglia 2004; McCarthy et al. 2008).
- *News agency characteristics*: Danzger (1975) showed years ago that the presence of a wire service in a city increases the likelihood that an event will be covered. Oliver and Myers (1999) show, for example, that “routinized” events confirming expectations about when, how, and where events are taking place are more likely to be covered by journalists than “non-routinized” events. Additional variables refer to audience characteristics and newspapers’ self-definition. For example, local newspapers are less

selective than national newspapers (e.g., Hocke 1998, 2002; Swank 2000), and liberal or extreme left newspapers are less selective than conservative papers (e.g., Oliver and Myers 1999; Koopmans 1995; Eilders 2001).

- *Issue characteristics*: protests that resonate with more general concerns are more likely to be reported. This is what Downs (1972) calls the “issue attention cycle,” and McCarthy et al. (1996a) call the “media attention cycle.” In empirical research, it is difficult to identify such attention cycles outside the newspaper coverage that such cycles are supposed to influence (Ortiz et al. 2005, 401). McCarthy et al.’s (1996a) study on Washington, DC, is most often cited as showing the effects of media attention cycles. But even though McCarthy et al. (1996a, 492) observed some effects, these effects “are dwarfed by the consequences of size on media coverage.” In another local study, Oliver and Maney (2000) show that legislative conflict over an issue increases the likelihood of a protest being covered.

Overall, the results on issue characteristics are less clear-cut than on event and news agency characteristics (Ortiz et al. 2005, 401). Another crucial question is whether these biases are consistent over time. Some studies find inconsistent patterns across short periods of a week or a month (e.g., Oliver and Maney 2000; Swank 2000; Myers and Schaefer Caniglia 2004), whereas others show that the patterns of selection bias tend to be stable. This holds especially within individual newspapers, for national sources, and over longer periods of time (e.g., McCarthy et al. 1996c; Barranco and Wisler 1999; McCarthy et al. 2008). Those who find rather negative results tend to focus on the local level and cover both protest events and more “conventional” forms of action (Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000). McCarthy et al. (2008) provided strong evidence in favor of the stability of bias. Based on data for Minsk (Belarus), the authors show that the patterns of selection bias are very stable, even in a period of political transition (i.e., from 1990 to 1995).

Scholars who adopt, in particular, a “representational” approach ask the question of whether adding more sources or sampling more articles from a specific source is really worth the investment. I believe that an answer to this question depends a great deal on the aggregation level of issues and time periods. For example, the minimalist strategy chosen by Kriesi et al. (1995) becomes more problematic when we disaggregate these variables too far. For example, tracing the development of a specific type of environmental protest over time (e.g., transportation issues), or looking at yearly changes in welfare-related protests, does not seem very reasonable with this dataset. To emphasize this point, Table 14.2 shows that when we take a middle-range aggregation level, the minimalist strategy leads to almost the same results as the more encompassing Prodat strategy. The table presents correlation coefficients for the trends based on Prodat and the updated Kriesi et al. dataset. It is clear that

Table 14.2 The Longitudinal Trends Based on Prodat (Rucht *et al.* 1992) and Kriesi *et al.* 2012¹¹

Time	N	Issues	Events	Participants
1975–97	23 years	All issues	0.85	0.79
1975–94	4 periods	All issues	0.93	0.95
1975–97	23 years	Cultural liberalism	0.89	0.94
		Environment	0.91	0.85
		Immigration	0.86	0.89
		Welfare	0.84	0.94
1975–94	4 periods	Cultural liberalism	0.99	0.99
		Environment	0.98	0.96
		Immigration	0.99	1.00
		Welfare	0.95	0.98

the more we aggregate the time variable (moving from one-year to five-year periods), the closer the fit between the two trend lines. Based on five-year periods, the development of the absolute number of events and participants is highly correlated ($r = 0.93$ and 0.95), and the salience of specific issues is even more closely related ($r > 0.96$).

Since there is no standard solution to the selection of sources, each researcher should at least explicitly justify the selection and discuss its advantages and disadvantages, as well as refer to the literature or their empirical material to discuss how the selection of source(s) might have affected the findings and general conclusions. However, as Earl *et al.* (2004, 96) state, in a historical perspective, it is “rather ironic that researchers are so concerned with selection bias.” Many earlier designs were not based on systematic quantitative research, or sampled on the dependent variable (Olzak 1989, 121). Thus, the discussion of selection bias problems should also focus on relative improvements over prior research strategies. As shown, the “how bad question” depends very much on your research question and the aggregation levels of key variables.

Finally, I would like to point to the possibility of *half-automated selection strategies*. We can distinguish rather simple keyword-based searches from more advanced methods. Some scholars doubt the usefulness of keyword-based searches (e.g., Maney and Oliver 2001), but our own experiences were very positive. When we updated the Kriesi *et al.* (1995) data, we used a comprehensive list of keywords to be both more efficient and consistent with the manually selected data sets. For example, we performed comparability tests based on the 1993–99 time period for Switzerland, and for two years in all the other countries. Overall, the results are good news for those relying on electronic selection, since there are hardly any differences between the manual and electronic search strategies (results available upon request). However, this type of selection is still very time consuming, since it entails

looking at many false-positive hits. More advanced technologies rely on text classifiers that usually work on word-frequency models. First, tests show that such techniques perform quite well and clearly reduce the workload involved in the selection of articles (see Wüest et al. 2013). While the half-automated selection of protest events from digital text sources works relatively well and can also be implemented quite easily in smaller research projects, the half-automated coding of events is still mainly restricted to English sources and to highly standardized types of texts (e.g., the titles of news agency reports, as used by some projects in the third generation of PEA; see the section headed “Four Generations of Protest Event Research”).

The accuracy of the electronic archives is, of course, another issue that needs to be considered when you plan to use the digital versions of newspapers. For example, in the case of the United Kingdom, we had to manually select all legends to pictures, since they were not systematically included in the electronic text archive of *The Guardian*. Thus, you should always check the quality of the electronic archive before the data collection. However, the quality of the digital newspaper archives has increased over time. Thus, potential differences between printed editions and the electronic archives seem no longer such a significant issue for research focused on more recent time periods.

WHAT SPECIFIC VARIABLES DO YOU WANT TO CODE? HOW DO YOU ORGANIZE THE CODING PROCESS?

For the coding, you should prepare a codebook in which you present instructions for the delineation of events as well as for the coding of all the variables that you are interested in. This step shows clearly just how flexible PEA is, since you can gather information on a whole range of characteristics of your coding unit. For example, the final Prodat dataset covers more than 170 variables, and the Europub dataset around 120 variables. However, as stated by Koopmans and Rucht (2002, 257), we should not “just create a shopping list of items of interest” when it comes to the specific variables coded. Note that Prodat and other datasets were created precisely to answer many different research questions and, therefore, the list of variables is very long. Apart from secondary analysis, this long list can also help you to see for which variables newspapers usually provide information (for an instructive list of variables, see Rucht and Neidhardt 1998, 82).

It is important to say that coding instructions should be formulated as precisely as possible. It is always advisable to work with examples and borderline cases. Even if one person alone does the coding, clear instruction guidelines need to be written. This helps a great deal when it comes to the analyses of the data, and it makes the work more accessible and comprehensible for

non-specialists. Again, the existing codebooks are very valuable sources and you should also consider making your own codebook and data available to your readers. In addition, it is important to formulate exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories for the specific variables. If multiple values for a given variable need to be coded (e.g., the goals of the protestors or the addressee), I would suggest using multiple variables and not additional categories of the same variable. It is also quite helpful for the recoding and analysis of the data when the dataset includes a string variable that contains a brief description of the event. For example, we let our coders briefly answer the following questions in this variable—Who protests? What form of action do they use? Where do they protest? What do they want? Preferably, the coder should use the words/phrases used in the article.

For the organization of the selection and coding process, it is important to treat it as a sequence of related steps. Based on their experiences with Prodat, Rucht and Neidhardt (1998, 85) present an ideal sequence of seven steps: (1) scanning and copying articles; (2) selecting articles that definitely refer to protest events; (3) sorting articles according to protest themes and campaigns; (4) reading articles over a period of several weeks or months; (5) coding protest events; (6) putting aside problematic cases for group discussion or a decision to be taken by the supervisor; and (7) depositing articles in the hard copy archive. I would also recommend separating these steps. In the case of electronic searches, it is also helpful to print out longer articles, which need to be coded. Furthermore, it is clearly worth investing some time in developing a coding application: this can range from a simple Excel file with a few macros to more sophisticated programs, such as Filemaker.

It is also important to note the problem of missing information. Often, newspapers do not report on all aspects of a protest event in which researchers are interested. For example, in the NPW protest event data, we are missing information on the number of participants in around every fifth event coded, while the number and type of organizations involved is not reported in more than half of all the events. How missing information is treated clearly depends on the type of information (e.g., missing information on the number of injured people often indicates that there were no injuries). In the NPW project, missing participation figures have been replaced by the national median of the number of participants for a given type of event (e.g., a demonstration) in that country. However, the overall number of participants is not affected as much by this decision, since only a very small fraction of events is responsible for a very large number of all participants being reported as taking part in protest activities.

Intercoder and intracoder reliability is an important issue, since we want to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the data generated by means of content analysis (Krippendorff 2004, 211ff.). In the end, the application of coding rules by humans will always involve subjective interpretation and thus

potential sources of error, which can be minimized by clear coding instructions and regular reliability tests (both before and during the coding process). It is significant to note that reliability needs to be tested, both for the identification of a relevant coding unit and for the coding of the various specific variables. Often, the consistent identification of relevant units (i.e., protest events or subject-relation-object triplets) is even more challenging than the coding of specific variables (e.g., the number of participants or form of action). To assess the reliability of a half-automated selection procedure, we gave an inexperienced coder our NPW codebook, without any further instructions, and obtained reliability measures of about 0.70 (identification) and 0.80 (coding of a broad type of issue/action form) (based on *The Guardian*, 2010). While the reliability measure for the coding just hits the magical threshold for reliability scores, the identification was clearly below the standard baseline of 0.80. With further training and a common discussion of problematic cases, we reached values of more than 0.90 in our actual research project.

A Final Note on Data Analysis

PEA and its offspring are techniques of data collection. Since one of the key aims of PEA is to transform words into numbers, statistical tools are usually used to analyze the collected data. However, note that part of the data allows a mixed-methods approach; that is, a combination of quantitative analyses with the presentation of more detailed qualitative material (e.g., the analyses of framing strategies sometimes combines these two approaches; see Statham et al. 2010). With respect to the statistical tools used to analyze protest event data, we can essentially use the whole repertoire that empirical social research offers (for ways to represent content analysis data, see Krippendorff 2004, 191ff.). In this section, I would just like to stress the potential of quite simple descriptive analyses of PEA data or of multivariate analyses of PEA data only. Good, illustrative examples of multivariate analyses that link protest event data with covariates from other sources are Braun and Koopmans' (2010) event history analysis of instances of racist violence in German counties, as well as Walgrave and Vliegenthart's (2012) time-series analysis of the agenda-setting power of protest.

Much PEA-based research presents quite simple descriptive statistics, such as the mobilization levels shown in Figure 14.1. This is clearly related to the fact that PEA scholars invest a great deal in the data collection, and collect information on objects that are not as easy to grasp, or, to restate Koopmans and Rucht (2002, 252), "PEA provides a solid ground in an area that is still often marked by more or less informed speculation." Thus, simple uni- or bivariate statistics and plots often help in answering key research questions,

and are an easy way to present your data. Apart from such simple graphs, we can rely on multivariate methods for analyzing the protest event data, ranging from methods that try to uncover a certain structure (e.g., factor analysis, multidimensional scaling) to those that try to test a certain structure (e.g., multiple regressions).

To give you an example, we were interested in the structure of the political space in the different political arenas. We used multidimensional scaling (MDS) techniques to uncover the structure of the partisan space and the party configuration within that space. MDS is a very flexible method, quite similar to factor analysis, and allows for a graphic representation of similarities or dissimilarities between pairs of objects (see Kruskal and Wish 1984; Cox and Cox 2001). The unfolding technique we used allows for the joint representation of actors (e.g., parties) and issues in a common space. In addition, a variant of MDS, called weighted metric multidimensional scaling, enabled us to account simultaneously for similarities between pairs of objects (party positions with respect to a set of issues in our case) and relationships (the salience of the respective issues for each party and the salience of the different parties in the party system).

Figure 14.2 shows our results for the protest arena (it is based on party-sponsored protest events only).⁸ It is shown that the protest configuration is two-dimensional. The central location of cultural liberalism, welfare, and environment shows these issues are rather consensual—at least when we focus exclusively on the protest arena. The second dimension is mainly due to conflicts over immigration. As we show, not only with this graph, immigration is the only salient and contested issue *within* the protest arena, and mobilization and counter-mobilization over migration-related issues open up a second dimension in the protest political space in Western Europe.

Another way to analyze protest event data is by means of multivariate regression analyses. In this case, it is, however, very important to have a clear model about what characteristic of a given protest event might influence another characteristic. A nice example is Walker et al.'s (2008) study on how action repertoires might partly depend on the institutional target that a movement selects. They explicitly discuss their ideas about what kind of other features of a protest (e.g., the protest claim and the initiating group) may influence the institutional target of a given event.

With respect to party-sponsored protest events, such a strategy could be used to answer the question of whether political parties are more likely to sponsor a protest event taking place at a certain stage of the electoral cycle, when controlling for the most important other characteristics of a given event. To do so, I also performed logistic regressions and used single protest events as my cases. More specifically, the models include two independent variables related to the timing of the event: (a) Has the event taken place during the election campaign or not? (b) Has the event taken place in the middle of the

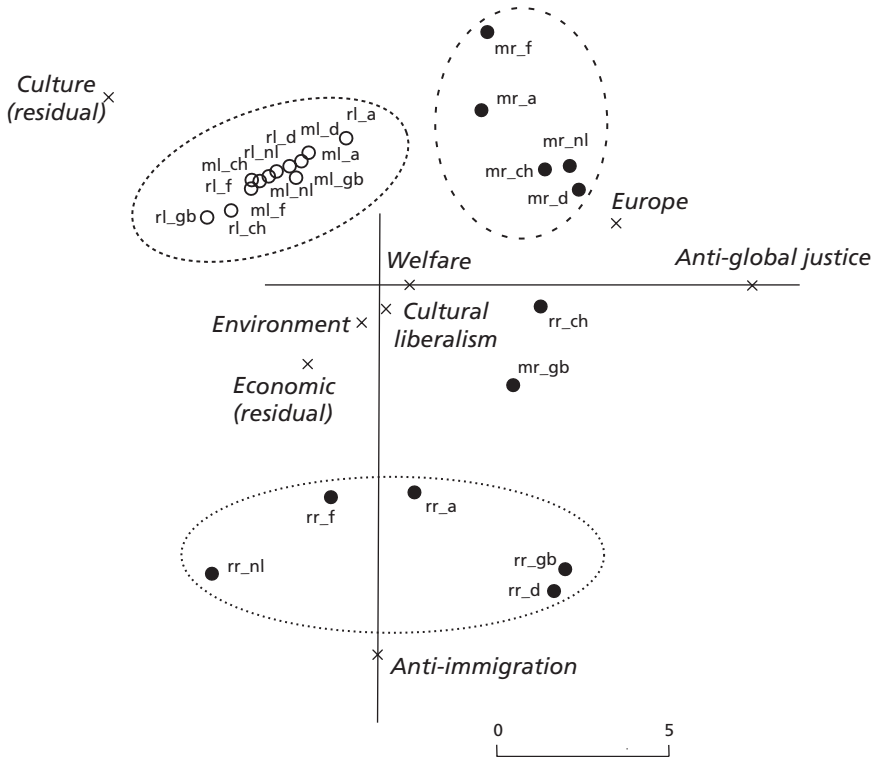


Figure 14.2 Party Groups in a West European Protest Space, 1975–2005

Stress -1 = 0.17

Legend: rl = radical left; ml = moderate left; mr = moderate right; rr = radical right

Note: For the MDS, party groups are weighted by their share of protest events, and the weights per country sum up to 1. The final configuration has been rotated so that the cultural conflict dimension is arranged vertically and positions supporting cultural demarcation are placed at the bottom.

electoral cycle or not?⁹ Regarding other characteristics of a protest event, I include information on the involvement of other formal organizations, the form of action, the number of participants, as well as the goal of the event. Table 14.3 shows that the hypothesis that parties’ involvement in protest activities closely follows the electoral cycle is not supported. Only the French political parties tend to be more likely to support protest events that take place both during the election campaign and in the middle of the electoral cycle. In all other countries, we find only significant effects of the other event characteristics on party sponsorship. In most countries, political parties are most likely to support moderate protest events with a high number of participants, and those events that are co-sponsored by other formal organizations. Thus, it seems more the event as such that leads political parties to enter the protest arena, and not so much the relative timing of elections.

Table 14.3 The Impact of Electoral Cycle and Event Characteristics on Party Sponsorship, 1975–2005^{10,11,12}

	Germany	France	Netherlands	Britain
Election campaign (yes = 1)	0.18	0.46*	0.07	-0.08
Middle of electoral cycle (yes = 1)	0.04	0.50***	-0.07	-0.39
<i>Event characteristics</i>				
Supported by				
... an established interest organization	1.42***	1.73***	1.51***	0.05
... a social movement organization	0.97***	0.85***	-0.04	-0.76**
Moderate action form (yes = 1)	0.64***	1.52***	0.64**	1.38***
Number of participants (1 to 5)	0.21***	0.10*	-0.05	0.41***
<i>Issue area</i>				
Cultural liberalism = ref.				
Immigration	-0.22	-0.19	-1.01	-1.80*
Environment	0.75***	0.74***	1.81***	2.49***
Cultural (others)	0.22	-0.47**	0.96*	0.98*
Welfare	-2.27***	-2.37***	1.08*	0.30
Economic (others)	-1.17***	-1.98***	-1.98**	1.00**
Others	-1.18***	-1.52***	-0.37	0.54
Constant	-3.88***	-4.41***	-4.01***	-5.56***
N	4,297	3,778	1,542	1,694
Pseudo-R ²	0.15	0.27	0.16	0.20

*** p < 0.001; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05; logistic regression, unstandardized coefficients

The choice of a specific type of data analysis should not depend on a researcher's general preference. Instead, statistical techniques should be used and combined that allow the author to answer the research question and that work with the collected data. For example, multivariate regressions clearly require a minimum number of cases. While it is difficult to give precise figures, many scholars recommend at least ten times as many observations as variables in a model (for an empirical test of certain rules of thumb, see Green 1991). Similarly, the effects of "outliers"—that is, extreme cases—need to be carefully examined if simple univariate measures are calculated based on a few cases only. Nonetheless, this does not mean that PEA may not be a useful strategy of data collection when dealing with "rare events;" but in that case you should search out statistical tools that are suited to deal with such situations (e.g., King and Zeng 2001) and/or combine quantitative evidence with a more qualitative and "eventful" description of your cases.

Conclusion: Inventing Creative Coding Units and Sampling Strategies

This chapter introduced traditional PEA and its most recent advances, which either cover a broader set of coding units or try to disaggregate single protest

events or contentious performances. To begin with, I presented a brief history of PEA research and introduced a few major research projects based on this technique. On the one hand, the overview should emphasize the broad range of questions that can be addressed with the help of protest event data. On the other, much of the existing datasets offer valuable sources for secondary analysis, or the possibility to extend the data in time and space. Thereafter, the main part of the chapter focused on aspects related to the data collection. More specifically, I presented the main decisions relating to the coding unit, the sampling unit, and the coding process. By doing so, I wanted to highlight that PEA is a very powerful and flexible tool for social research. However, every scholar needs to make fundamental decisions that are based on both research interests and pragmatic considerations. For example, broadening the coding unit leads to valuable information on important co-variables of protest events (e.g., elite discourse) and allows us to situate the activities of SMOs and other NGOs in the wider public debate over certain issues. At the same time, it tends to move a researcher's focus away from protest events (which are often rather rare events in these datasets).

This chapter also briefly summarized the main conclusions of the literature on the selection bias of newspaper data. As Earl et al. (2004, 77) so aptly stated,

In fact, the evidence suggests that social movement researchers face the same question that almost all other social scientists face: Are the best available, yet imperfect, data worthy of analysis? We argue that researchers can effectively use such data and that newspaper data does not deviate markedly from accepted standards of quality. . . . We conclude that researchers must approach newspaper data with a humble understanding that, although not without its flaws, it remains a useful data source. Thus, researchers should avoid both the unexamined use of newspaper data as well as blanket condemnations of its use.

I believe that this advice holds not only for newspaper-based data but for protest event analysis and its offspring more generally.

Because of the resource-intensive nature of PEA and related techniques, most studies cited in this chapter came out of large-scale and often collaborative research projects. This is also reflected in the way the results are reported and published. While there are many journal articles published based on protest event data—especially related to the questions of selection bias—the most influential contributions in the field are published as single or co-authored monographs. Publishing the findings based on PEA and its offspring in this way allowed the researchers to exploit the full descriptive potential of their data, to embed the quantitative findings in a broader theoretical argument, and to give the reader all the necessary details about the way the data were collected in the first place. However, this should not suggest that PEA cannot and should not be used in smaller research efforts. But, as suggested in this chapter, researchers should definitely test their strategy in a pretest and should invest in new and creative research designs, which may also take advantage of the already available datasets.

In general, I would like to urge social movement scholars to be creative when it comes to new coding units and to sampling strategies, as well as to the combination of different types of content analysis within a single research project. For example, we are still missing a coding unit that really links protest events within chains of various political activities in other political arenas. Moreover, it is as yet not very common to code broader public debates among various types of actors by means of PCA (or another relational type of content analysis), and then over-sample articles relating to relevant protest events and code these articles with the help of a traditional PEA. This would allow the researcher to broaden the unit of analysis without the risk of losing sight of protest politics. Furthermore, the potential of sophisticated tools for automated content analysis has not yet been fully exploited in social movement studies.

■ NOTES

1. Such selection bias needs to be distinguished from description and research biases. Description bias means that newspapers report false information about covered events, whereas researcher bias refers to coding and data entry errors (e.g., Franzosi 1987; McPhail and Schweingruber 1998).
2. The list of Kriesi et al. is more restricted than the forms covered by Prodát, as it does not cover action forms, such as internal protest meetings, resolutions, press conferences or litigations. To be precise, part of these activities were coded as ‘conventional’ activities by Kriesi et al. but only for new social movement issues and, therefore, were not used in most parts of their analyses on “unconventional activities.”
3. Kriesi (2009, 347) has suggested focusing on “event quadruples” as the basic coding unit, which consist of “action t1 (of claimant)-reactions (of target/public)-reactions (of claimant)-action t2 (of claimant).” By doing so, he claims that we do not lose the focus on protest events, because the action of the claimant at t1 constitutes the first protest event in the quadruple, the action at t2 the second protest event. However, it remains to be seen how such an approach can be implemented.
4. The core sentence approach, which has been developed by Kleinnijenhuis and his colleagues closely resembles PCA and Franzosi’s approach (see, e.g., Kleinnijenhuis et al. 1997; Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001). PCA and the core sentence approach produce very similar results, but I think that the latter has some advantages because of its more operational coding unit (for an empirical comparison, see Vliegenthart et al. 2004).
5. There are two exceptions to this general rule: (a) if an article reports on several events that took place in different cities at the same time but the article contains no other specification apart from their locality, we code one protest event with the total number of participants reported (if there is, however, only one further piece of information given—e.g. number of participants per event, number of injured or arrested persons—the events are treated as separate events); (b) if an article reports on different actions (chains of events), which are distinguishable from each other neither spatially nor temporally. In these cases, different actions are coded as separate protest events if there are significant changes either concerning the goals or the participants.

6. Furthermore, the newspapers were selected with respect to six criteria: continuous publication throughout the research period, daily publication (Monday to Saturday), high quality, comparability with regard to political orientation (none is either very conservative or extremely left-wing), coverage of the entire national territory, and similar selectivity when reporting on protest events (for an empirical test of the last two criteria, see Hutter forthcoming).
7. Authors studying selection bias compare local and national newspapers (e.g., Fillieule 1997; Hocke 1998, 2002; Swank 2000), newspapers and television (McCarthy et al. 1996b), or newspapers and non-media sources (especially police archives) (e.g., Barranco and Wisler 1999; Fillieule 1996; McCarthy et al. 1996c; Hocke 1998, 2002; Oliver and Myers 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000). Recently, scholars also relied on qualitative interviews with journalists (Fillieule and Jiménez 2003). The key results of these literature are presented in the section entitled “Data Collection: Small Questions, Big Impacts.”
8. As Rucht notes (1998, 41), “[t]hose serving as sponsors of protest almost always also participate, so that these roles can only rarely be separated when information is derived from newspapers.”
9. Both aspects are measured with the help of dummy variables. For example, a value of 1 for the election campaign variable means that the event has taken place within the two-month period before the day of the national parliamentary election (this is the way we defined the election campaign period in our project on the new integration–demarcation cleavage). If we observe a significant and positive effect for this variable (as in the case of France), this indicates that the likelihood of a protest event being sponsored by a political party is clearly higher shortly before election day than during the rest of the legislative period. Since we control for many other aspects of a protest event, we attempt to control for the effects of other factors, apart from electoral considerations, that might lead political parties to support protests.
10. For the projects in the list, the interested reader can find all information on the data collection as well as the data in public archives and/or directly on the Web. For many of the other projects that were mentioned in the section “Four Generations of Protest Event Research,” however, it is easy to get additional information on the data collection (and sometimes even the data) by contacting the authors directly.
11. Note: correlation coefficients; “events” refers to the *absolute* number of coded protest events for all issues, and the share in percent of all coded issues for the specific issues; the four time periods are 1975–79, 1980–84, 1985–89, and 1990–94.
12. Logistic regression analysis (1 = party-supported protest event). The number of participants has been classified into five groups: <100 = 1; 101–1,000 = 2; 1,001–5,000 = 3; 5,001–10,000 = 4; >10,000 = 5.

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15 Social Network Analysis

Manuela Caiani

Definition: What Is Social Network Analysis?

Social network analysis (SNA) is a methodological and conceptual toolbox for the measurement, systematic description, and analysis of relational structures (Schneider 2008). In other words, network analysis conceives (and operationalizes) a social structure in terms of networks of links among units; that is, a set of nodes that are hierarchically related according to the control of and access to embedded resources in their positions, which are entrusted to occupants (that is, actors) acting upon structural constraints and opportunities (Cinalli 2004, 6). Thus, in social network analysis, the structure and its relational characteristics impact on social actors which aim to maintain and gain resources (both material and non-material) through their networks (Cinalli 2004, 6). Indeed, as Wasserman and Faust (1994) observe, “the unit of analysis in network analysis is not the individual, but an entity consisting of a collection of individuals and the linkages among them. Network methods focus on dyads (two actors and their ties), triads (three actors and their ties), or larger systems (subgroups of individuals, or entire networks).”

In particular, five central principles distinguish this program of research from “standard” social science perspectives (Borgatti et al. 2002, see also Cinalli 2004):

- First, social network analysis focuses on relations between actors. Actors and their relations are seen as interdependent rather than independent units.
- Second, the relations between them are the most meaningful focus of analysis.
- Third, the structural and/or relational features of these actors constitute the analytically relevant characteristics of them.
- Fourth, relational ties between these actors are the channels for the flow of both material and non-material resources.
- Finally, the complete web of actors, their positions and their linkages—network structure—provides opportunities for (and constraints upon) action.

This means that, as noted by Scott (1992), “Social network analysis has emerged as a set of methods for the analysis of social structures, methods which are specifically geared towards an investigation of the relational aspects of these structures. The use of these methods, therefore, depends on the availability of relational rather than attribute data.”

Initially, social network analysis (SNA) was an analytical tool developed by structural anthropology and sociology to describe relationships between members of a community (Piselli 1999; Scott 1992). The basic idea behind this approach is that communication flows and interactions are the constitutive elements of social groups. Everything began with the investigation of anthropologist Claude Lévy-Strauss who, while studying the organization of populations like the Keraja and the Bororo, found that village planning was complexly related to the family and to the social relationships within the communities (Lévy-Strauss 1960, 208, quoted in Tateo 2005, 3).¹ Subsequently, SNA has experienced a growing interest along with an increased use and application in many different fields such as social psychology, sociology, ethology, and anthropology, as well as biology, economics, geography, and history (see Figure 15.1).

Social network analysis has been considered as particularly interesting for social movements, which are networks whose formal characteristics have been addressed in the development of theories of collective behavior (Snow et al. 1986; Fernandez and McAdam 1988; McAdam 1988; Gould 1993; Diani 1995). In fact, individual and organizational social networks are important elements in the processes of collective mobilization, increasing the communication and the coordination flows among groups (Diani 2003a). They are also considered to influence individual behavior and readiness to take part in collective action (della Porta and Diani 2006) as, for example, in the case

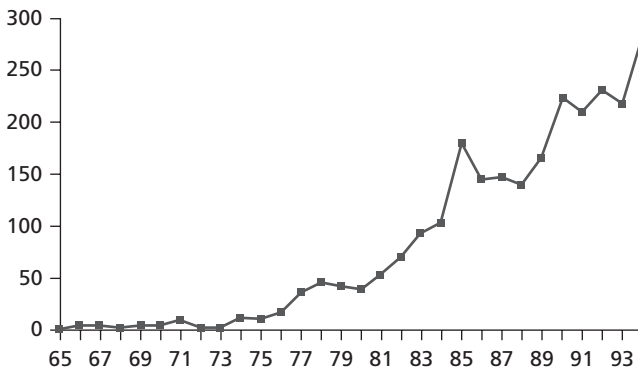


Figure 15.1 Growth of Social Networks: Number of Articles in Sociological Journals Containing “Social Networks” in the Abstract

Source: Borgatti et al. 2002, <<http://www.analytictech.com/networks/whatis.htm>> (accessed April 4, 2014).

of friendship and family ties which have been found to favor political participation, even in radical groups (della Porta 1995). Furthermore, the shape of networks has been connected to the forms of action used by organizations within a particular social movement sector, being likely to be more disruptive within highly segmented networks and more moderate within densely connected networks (Hadden 2008).

The increasing success recently enjoyed by the “networks” concept in the social sciences is linked to its flexibility, which allows the researcher to deal with the phenomena of change that cannot be easily explained if scientific attention is limited to macro-categories such as nation-states or formal bureaucracies or, at the other extreme, to individual actors (Mutti 1996). The network analysis approach enables the researcher to emphasize the meso level of social analysis, filling the gap between structure and agency (Hayes 2001), and focusing attention on the connection between the micro and macro dimensions (Emirbayer and Sheller 1999). Indeed, as pointed out by Mario Bunge, “to explain a thing . . . is to show how it works, and to explain a fact is to show how it came to be,” “. . . we explain facts by invoking some mechanism . . .” (Bunge 1996, 137, quoted in Schneider 2008).

Scholars interested in social capital have emphasized the importance of social links as resources of individual actors that increase the probability of success of their own actions (e.g., Lin 2001). Networks are also seen as vehicles of meaning, crucial for the sharing of values, frames, and identities (Cinalli 2006). Finally, networks can be interpreted as configurations of context (environment), opportunities, and constraints of collective action (e.g., Broadbent 2003).

In what follows, I give an overview of the theoretical background of social network analysis, discussing the main characteristics, as well as the advantages and challenges of this approach. For this illustration, I draw on empirical research conducted by the author on a very peculiar type of network: web links in the multi-organizational field of the extreme right in Italy, Germany, and the United States (see Caiani et al. 2012). The investigation comprises a *social network analysis* applied to more than 300 extreme right organizations (websites) and their mutual online (hyper)links, in order to characterize the structure and mobilization potential of the extreme right milieu in each selected country. This will be integrated with many other examples of works focusing on more traditional networks of social movements.

Research Design: Theories and Conceptualization

The two main concepts of SNA are nodes and ties. Nodes can represent an individual, as well as organizations, objects, or events, and even frames. For

example, many works today try to integrate social network analysis and protest event analysis (e.g., Osa 2001). Similarly, the ties that link nodes can represent any sort of relations between them (Marin and Wellman 2010), for instance relations of cooperation, disagreement, or influence. Broadly speaking, the types of social relations that can be represented through network data include a) social roles (e.g., brother; father; boss; teacher); b) affective relations (e.g., friendship; positive or negative evaluations, such as like, respect, hate, etc.); c) cognitive relations (e.g., knowledge; information); d) organizational relations (co-organization; exchange of information; transfer of resources; co-occurrence, for instance being in the same political party; co-participating in a demonstration, etc.); e) actions (e.g., talking; having lunch; attacking) (see Table 15.1).

Regardless of the nature of the set of actors and the social relations we want to investigate, the distinctive point of social network theoretical perspective is that “structure affects substantive outcomes” and “emergent effects” (Borgatti et al. 2002). This is why network theory is sympathetic with systems theory and complexity theory (Borgatti et al. 2002). In this sense, as previously underlined, “network analysis assumes that the way the members of a group can communicate with each other affect some important features of that group (efficiency when performing a task, moral satisfaction, leadership). . .” and “. . . mathematical tools and concepts that belong to graph theory” are useful to investigate this (quoted in Gretzel 2001). For example, the so-called “attributes of ego network” (namely the relational attributes of the individual nodes/actors) influence the actor’s access to resources; the closeness in a network between the nodes/actors might have an impact on influence and diffusion; and a similarity of positions between actors can affect their similarity of risks, opportunities, and outcomes. In fact, “social network analysis is focused on uncovering the patterning of people’s interaction. Network analysis is based on the intuitive notion that these patterns are important features of the lives of the individuals who display them” (Freeman 2006).² Network analysts believe that how an individual lives largely depends on how that individual is tied to the larger web of social connections. For instance, looking at

Table 15.1 Social Network Concepts

Actor/node/point/agent	Social entities such as persons, organizations, cities, etc.
Tie/link/edge/line/arc	Represents relationships among actors
Dyad	Consists of a pair of actors and the (possible) tie(s) between them
Triad	A subset of three actors and the (possible) tie(s) between them
Subgroup	Subset of actors and all ties among them
Relation	Collection of ties of a specific kind between members of a group
Social network	Finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined by them

Source: Wasserman and Faust 1994.

the theory of the underclass through the lens of relations rather than using attribute or group-based factors as explanation, Wilson (1978; 1987, quoted in Marin and Wellman 2010, 9) has argued that the social mobility of poor African Americans is hindered by their social isolation, as they live in high-poverty neighborhoods and have lost connections to people who provide ties to the labor market. In addition, many believe that the performance of entire societies and organizations often depends on the patterning of their internal structure (Freeman 2006). For this reason, social network analysis has been adopted by several different schools of sociology that are interested in the study of political networks, their formation, and consequences—for example, the studies on “political exchange,” “elite networks,” “participation and social capital,” “governance and interest intermediation,” and, more recently, “culturalist approaches” (Schneider et al. 2007). In sum, the main questions usually answered through SNA are “In which way do the actors (organizations) of one society remain related to each other?,” “How can this influence their behavior?,” “How is the structure of the networks in which the actors operate configured?,” “How does this influence the dynamics between the actors?” (see Figure 15.2).

Whereas descriptive network analysis can focus only on network variables (e.g., formalist theories), explanatory analysis can use these patterns of relations, either as independent variables (i.e., as causes of the phenomenon of interest) or as dependent variables (to be explained in turn with factors external to networks, like the cultural and political contexts), or both,³ seeking to address substantive issues.

In particular, among social movements scholars, some have applied social network analysis to understand (networks as ‘causes’) the nature of social movements, their structures, and their dynamics (inter-organizational exchanges, coalition building, overlapping membership: for example, see Diani 1995; Ansell 2001; Diani and Bison 2004); processes of collective action and counter-mobilization (e.g. Franzosi 1997; 1999); and the role of advocacy groups, public interests, and social movement organizations in policy networks (e.g., Broadbent 1998; Caiani 2009; Bassoli and Cinalli forthcoming). Recently, mobilization through online social networks has also been explored (Caiani and Parenti 2013), and the linkages between networks and



Figure 15.2 The Effects of Networks

Source: Borgatti, Steve, Everett, Martin, and Freeman, Lin (2002). *Ucinet for Windows: Software for Social Network Analysis*. Analytic Technologies, Harvard, <<http://www.analytictech.com/networks/whatis.htm>> (accessed April 4, 2014).

discourses (Leifeld 2013), as well as the complexity of the European polity (i.e., the interactions between actors at different levels of governance, Kriesi 2004).

Others, considering networks as dependent variables (networks as “effects”), have inquired instead what kind of social factors led to particular relational outcomes. For example, some researchers have examined the individual positions of single nodes within a network, asking questions such as: “Why are some actors more central than others?”; “Why do some play a role as broker?” (e.g., Diani 2003b or Cinalli 2004, who link institutional external resources of the actors to their prominence within the network). Others have looked at the overall configuration of the network, focusing on the overall structures of networks in specific communities such as deeply divided societies (e.g., Cinalli 2003; Gould 1995); on how social support networks are changing (e.g. Grossetti 2005); and on the effects of new technology on them (e.g. Hampton 2007; Stern 2008). For example, Menjivar (2000), studying Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco, demonstrated that network relations “are strained and severed when economic conditions and positions preclude meeting obligations of reciprocity.”

Some mechanisms are identified for the causes and the effects of networks, among them transmission, adaptation, binding, and exclusion. Indeed, through networks many things can flow: from material aid, to information, norms, and values, to social support, to identities. Moreover, “network positions create obligations and commitments that alter the calculus of rationality by promoting trustworthiness and relieving people of the fear that their interaction partners will always be strictly and ruthlessly rational” (Marin and Wellman 2010, 10).

In our research, we focused our attention on investigating the organizational and potential mobilizational structures of the right-wing milieu in different countries. Applying a social network analysis to the online contacts between (these) organizations appeared very useful for this purpose. We started from the observation that, despite the growing importance of the linking practices of extremists and other groups on the Web (Ackland and Gibson 2005, 1) to date, the mapping of these online networks has been very limited. Yet, hyperlink data constitutes a rich source of insight into the online networking behavior of any political organization (Ackland and Gibson 2005, 1); all over the world, right-wing extremists are increasingly using the Internet as a tool for communication. According to the American monitoring organization, Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), almost one thousand right-wing groups were active in the United States in 2010,⁴ most of them with a presence online. They use the Internet for recruitment, and to create alliances with other groups, as well as to attack political enemies and build contacts with other extremist organizations at the national as well as the international level—which in turn can increase the mobilization potential

of the right-wing sector (Caiani and Parenti 2013). In Germany, for example, the series of Bulletin Board Systems connected to the Thule network aided German neo-Nazi activists to conserve links and connections amongst themselves, avoiding the dissolution of many of their groups in the first half of the 1990s (Caldiron 2001, 335).

Against this background, we were convinced that an analysis of how (right-wing) extremist groups use the infrastructure of the Internet could help us to better understand the groups themselves. Usually, being volatile and often illegal or violent, extremist groups are very difficult objects of empirical investigation. Certainly, the analysis of virtual links between these organizations does not mirror the “real” relations they might have outside the Net. Nevertheless, this kind of study can shed light on an area of virtual activity and of social exchange between right-wing groups who use the Internet as an additional channel in order to construct their common identities. Therefore, the online links are considered as good indicators of common objectives, ideological closeness, or shared interests between the groups.

Our goal was therefore to explore the organizational structure of the extreme right, reflecting on specific actors’ visibility, and configurations of power, as well as alliances and potential conflicts between these groups. We focused on the level of individual organizations, examining which types of right-wing actors occupy a central (and therefore potentially “influential”) position in the network and which are more peripheral. Following social capital scholars, we argue that social links (i.e., networks) are relational resources of actors (e.g., in order to increase the probability of success of their own actions). We then explored the formation of specific coalitions of communication between the various extremist groups, looking at their composition (e.g., their homogeneity or heterogeneity) and at the relationship between them. In this regard, in line with scholars emphasizing a “political opportunity structures” approach, networks can be interpreted as configurations of a context (environment) of both opportunities and constraints to collective action (Diani 2003a). In this sense, networks are seen as “intermediaries” between resources and mobilization (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008, 8). Finally, we tried to characterize the overall configuration of these three extreme right sectors by looking at how dense, how conflicting or consensual, and how segmented or centralized they are (for specific social network measures used to characterize these notions, see the section entitled “Applied Method: Main Dilemmas in Data Collection”). We expected that collective action would be easier in the presence of dense social ties, which facilitate the exchange of resources and the construction of a common identity, whereas weak links can lead to processes of pacification or laziness (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). We also hypothesized that the overall configuration of the extreme right network would vary across the three countries under study, offering a different mobilization potential for the far right movement.

Table 15.2 Social Network Data (e.g., *Influence in a policy field*)

	A	B	C	D
A	–	0	1	1
B	1	–	0	1
C	0	1	–	
D	1	0	0	–

Social network methodology encompasses specific steps for collecting data, sampling, statistical analysis, and visual representation. First, the researcher identifies a population of actors (the “nodes”); he/she then collects data on the ties (or links) among the actors, and the resulting data are arranged in an $N \times N$ matrix, with one row and one column for each node (see Table 15.2).

Suppose we are describing the structure of influence in a policy field among four stakeholders/organizations (4: . . . A, B, C, D). In social network analysis, this pattern of influence is described with a matrix like the one in the previous paragraph, where the rows represent choices by each actor/organization. If an organization has influence, this is represented by a “1” (e.g., if we are learning this information through interviews “reports influencing”); a “0” represents a lack of influence. There are many things that we can notice from this matrix:

- The important information is either the presence of a tie or its absence.
- The locations on the main diagonal are empty, because there are no auto-referential relations.
- There are roughly equal numbers of ones and zeroes in the matrix. This suggests that there is a moderate “density” of influence overall.
- We can also compare the cells above and below the diagonal (comparing the proportion of zeroes and ones within the two sides) to see if there is reciprocity in choices/influence (e.g., org. A influences org. C; does C. influence A? No!)

In SNA, the matrix is then analyzed with software such as Ucinet, Pajek, and Visone, for example.⁵ These networks (matrices) are often depicted in social network diagrams, where nodes are represented as points, and ties are represented as lines (see Figure 15.5 for our graphs of extreme right online communities).

But, what is different about network data? We can look at social network data in the same way we look at “conventional” sociological data. We can consider the rows as sampling a list of cases and the columns as attributes of each actor (namely as “variables”) (e.g., the relations—or the absence of relations—with other actors can be considered as “attributes” of each actor). The major difference between conventional sociological data and network data is

that the former focus on actors and attributes, and the latter on actors and relationships. In SNA, actors are described by their relations to other actors, not by their attributes (e.g., political participation can be seen through the lens of socio-demographic attributes and through the relational links of individuals, and so on) (see also Cinalli 2007).

This difference strongly influences the choices that the researcher must make in deciding on a research design, in conducting sampling, developing a measurement, and finally in analyzing the results. For sampling in “conventional” sociological approaches, each case is introduced in the analysis by chance: they are independent from each other, and they are introduced by random sampling. To the contrary, in network analysis, the cases are not independent, because the researcher includes them in the analysis for their link to the other cases/actors already introduced. For example, when studying the ties of close cooperation among organizations, and an organization A is introduced, I must also include in my sample (network) all the organizations to whom organization A reports (i.e., in the questionnaire) to collaborate in order to corroborate my findings. This implies that social network methodology poses many challenges (and specificities) for the researcher, as will be addressed in this chapter.

Applied Method: Main Dilemmas in Data Collection

The sources of information on network data can be of various types, depending on the research question at stake and the problems addressed by the investigation. The most common, however, are:

1. questionnaires;
2. direct observation;
3. written records (text and documents, e.g., archival or diary);
4. experiments;
5. derivation (Gretzel 2001).

In addition, web links, as were used for our research on right-wing communities, are increasingly being used as a source of network data, along with other Internet-related platforms such as blogs and forums (Vaidyanathan, Shore, and Billingham 2009). When using surveys and questionnaires, each actor is asked about their relations with other actors (e.g., in terms of giving advice) (in row-based matrix), or each actor is asked, not only to whom they give advice, but from whom they receive it (in this latter case we have a row- and column-based matrix) (Borgatti et al. 2002).

Question

- Would you please make a check in front of the name of all organizations of this list with whom your organization regularly and routinely discusses national energy policy matters!

Oil and Gas Industry

Production Companies	We do	Both	They Do
___ 001. American Natural Resources Company	___	___	___
___ 002. Ashland Oil Inc	___	___	___
___ 003. Atlantic Richfield Co.	___	___	___

Figure 15.3 Source of Network Data: A Question Used in Survey

For example, Laumann and Knoke (1987, 473), in research aiming at reconstructing and investigating energy policy networks, used the questionnaire shown in Figure 15.3.

Kriesi and colleagues (2006), on the basis of interviews, looked at the networks of *alliance*, *conflict*, and *influence* among actors who mobilize around European themes (agriculture, immigration, and European integration) in several European countries. Beginning with a list of 40 actors, considered the most important in each policy domain, each interviewee (from the list) was asked with which other actors in the policy field they had “close ties” (cooperation), and “greatest disagreement” (disagreement), and which they have “sought to influence in the last 5 years” (targeting).⁶ The three matrices of ties thus obtained were analyzed through techniques of network analysis. (See Figure 15.4.)

In “direct observations,” the “observer in the room or area records all interactions and relations that exist or take place over a continuous period in front of the observer” (e.g., the patterns of interactions between participants in a deliberative arena); when the source of relational data is “written record,” relations are coded on the basis of written or stored documents (e.g., diplomatic and military interaction among countries, migration flows); in “experiments,” relations between research objects are obtained by measures of experimental control (e.g., planting of rumors in schools or colleges and observations of the spread over time) (Schneider 2008). Creating relational data by “derivation” means to “construct an actor-by-actor matrix by counting the number of events/groups that each pair of actors has in common,” for example, co-participation of people or organizations in events/committees/boards; co-citation/co-appearance of authors/organizations in documents (Schneider 2008). However, each of these sources of data has

		Tried to influence Q17	Closely collaborated Q20	Disagreement Q22
1	Council of Minister	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Coreper (Committee of permanent representative)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Eur. Commission: DG Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Eur. Commission: DG Health and Consumer Protection	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Eur. Commission: Veterinary Committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	SCA (Special Committee on Agriculture)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	SEC Social and Economic Committee of the EU	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	EFSA (European Food Safety Authority)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	EAAC (European Environment Advisory Councils)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	WTO (World Trade Organization)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 15.4 List of Organizations

Note: the list continues up to 40 actors.

both merits and biases, which need to be carefully considered in order to conduct a valid and reliable SNA. For example, in SNA research using participant surveys as input, the participant's expertise (which can vary from random participants to extremely focused work-groups, depending on the research question being answered) is considered a factor which will impact confidence in the results produced (Vaidyanathan, Shore, and Billinghamurst 2009).

Another common problem in SNA is "boundary specification," namely the delineation of the network and identification of actors within them. There can be indeed two types of networks: complete/total vs. partial networks (Barnes 1954). Sometimes natural boundaries exist, but often, networks are global: "if we are looking at needle-sharing among drug users, we can artificially bound the network at some arbitrary boundary, such as city or neighborhood, but this distorts the data. Yet we cannot let the network get too large because we cannot process the data" (Borgatti et al. 2002). As noted, "Data-sets have to be accurate and representative of the problem being addressed, in order to provide confidence in the research being conducted" (Vaidyanathan, Shore, and Billinghamurst 2009). Several techniques have been developed for the specification of boundaries (Laumann and Knoke 1987; Schneider 2008). They are nominalist, positional, decisional, reputational, expert panels, event linkages, and name generators vs lists of actors/organizations.

In our study on right-wing extremist networks, we had to address some difficult problems in terms of sampling. We were examining social groups that exist outside the visible mainstream of society (i.e., “hidden communities”) and, as some researchers have stressed, website analysis is quite problematic because it is impossible to determine the real dimension and the nature of the population. The Internet is in a state of continuous flux, and there is no exhaustive directory of websites. In order to perform our data web collection—namely to identify all Italian, German, and American extreme right organizations with a presence online—we applied a snowball technique that led us to single out samples of approximately 100 organizations for Italy and Germany respectively, and 300 for the United States. Based on sources of various kinds (official reports, secondary literature, etc.),⁷ we first identified the most important extreme right organizations in Germany, Italy, and the United States (e.g., the political parties). Then, beginning with these and focusing exclusively on “friends” links explicitly indicated by these organizations,⁸ we discovered the websites of minor and lesser-known groups.⁹ The process was repeated up to the point at which it became impossible to add new sites or organizations to our sample. We have thus classified those organizations found in the three countries into broader categories and codified the relational patterns between them in a manual process.¹⁰ In all cases, we excluded the use of more automatic and systematic techniques for the research of all the links that can be found on a webpage, in order to (manually) select only those links on the pages of partner sites, assuming that these can be considered proxies for affinity relations and a measure of closeness between the organizations.

As mentioned, visualizing social networks assists researchers in managing data and effectively converting them into meaningful information.

For example, in our research, the visualization of the extreme right communities online (Figure 15.5) showed us that the galaxy of websites related to the extreme right is a complex sector, and includes different categories of groups. The network for Italy is composed of 79 organizations with 417 links; the German one has 78 organizations, connected through 473 links; and the US network has 134 organizations with 169 links within the network. Anheier (2003), focusing on “real” ties of individual members of the Nazi party in 1920s–1930s, found that early activists were not marginal, isolated persons, but rather they were largely embedded in organizational networks. Our three virtual communities (“networks”) also include various types of organizations (“nodes”), characterized by different ideological tendencies and mobilizing around different issues. They vary from extreme right political parties and movements, to neo-Nazi groups; from revisionist/negationist and nostalgic groups to cultural right-wing associations; from publishers and commercial sites (“militaria”) to subcultural youth organizations, such as skinheads, music, and sports groups. In addition to these groups, which are

c) Usa¹: 'decentralized'



Key:	
Organizational Type	Symbol
Political parties	Grey circle
Political movements (& white supremacists in the US case)	Grey square
Nostalgic, revisionist, negationist groups	Grey triangle
Neonazis	Grey box with cross
Cultural, new age, neo-mystical, traditional Catholic orgs (& Christian identity and KKK in the US case)	Grey down triangle
Commercials and publishers	Grey circle in black box
Subcultural organizations	Grey diamond
Nationalistic and patriotic organizations	Cross

Figure 15.5 (Continued)

common to the Italian and German extreme right milieu, we also identified for the United States other specific types of right-wing groups with a presence online: white supremacists, Christian identity, and Ku Klux Klan groups, and militia and patriot organizations. In sum, we could see that, in the selected European countries as well as in the United States, the extreme right area is far from being homogeneous.

Levels of Analysis: Nodes, Subgroups, Whole Network

An advantage of the network analysis approach (and method), as already highlighted, is that it enables the researcher to focus on multiple levels of analysis at the same time and in a convenient way (Hanneman 2001). Analyses can focus on the *whole network*, discussing its structural properties at a macro level; on *individual nodes*, demonstrating (with a micro-level analysis) the characteristics and relational resources of single groups or organizations; or on *subgroups* of nodes (meso level), grasping the coalitional dynamics among them. There are different SNA measurements for each level.

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS 1: THE WHOLE NETWORK

Looking at the whole network means investigating the extent to which a community under study (being a movement sector, a local community, an international online movement, etc.) can be characterized as a cohesive field or, on the contrary, how far it is possible to identify potential lines of cleavages within it. In order to address these important issues, some of the most common measurements in social network analysis are, first, the “density of the network,” whose values can vary between 0 and 1, where 0 and 1 represent the two ideal situations, namely a network without any links and a network where every actor is linked to every other. Another measurement is the “average distance” between the organizations (i.e., “nodes”), which refers to the distance, on average, of the shortest way to connect any two actors in a network. The smaller the average distance, the more cohesive a network. Another is the “average degree,” which shows the organizations’ average number of contacts. We expect that groups being part of networks with a high average degree are more likely to collaborate, surmounting the distances by which they are separated (Cinalli and Füglister 2008). This measure can also be considered as indicating the degree of “activism” in actors’ networking within one sector. Finally, the “degree of centralization” indicates the extent to which a network is organized around one (or more) central actor (or to use more technical terminology, the degree of variance around a mean value).

Concerning internal features of a whole network, Osa (2003), focusing on changes in the informal networks of overlapping membership between organizations opposing the Communist regime in Poland in 1960s–80s, found that when civic organizations are oppressed by severe constraints, informal networks are a particularly important alternative source of resources (100). They operate as micro-mobilization contexts, as well as providing the basic infrastructure for the civic society. More recently, regarding the (difficult)

organizational aspect of transnational movements, a flexible network structure (not centralized but connected enough, “with some of the participants which have histories of collaborative mobilization;” Kavada 2003, 4) has been related to the capacity of the antiglobalization movement to unite ideologically disparate groups and plan common protests and events (Kavada 2003, 5).

The overall characteristics of a network have been also used to shed light on the relationship between the external environment and the movement itself. In a comparative study of unemployment and asylum issue fields in Britain, Cinalli (2004) found that the web of ties forged by pro-asylum and pro-unemployed organizations (movements, non-governmental organizations, and voluntary groups), through their horizontal networks (i.e., exchange of information and contacts), was very different in the two public domains, being highly dense in the former and more disconnected in the latter. In particular, the low structural density of the pro-unemployed network would have provided, according to the author, “only specific opportunities for action, encouraging these organizations to specialize in a few specific techniques which are exclusively employed at the national level,” in particular in “vertical ties with institutional actors”/through vertical ties. . . (Cinalli 2004, 10). Oliver and Myers (2003, 199), focusing on protest cycles, used simulation data to assess that differences in the density of a network and in the network structure (i.e., centralization) can influence participation rates. Broadbent (2003, 223), paying greater attention to the origins of networks of mobilization, by looking at links between local communities and local elites, argued that the success of protest ultimately depends on the structure of these networks, which shape differently the opportunities for the challenges in the different communities.

Our research, examining the overall internal characteristics of the extreme right milieu that can favor or hinder collective action, showed us that the German extreme right emerges as the “strongest”, having the possibility of profiting from a cohesive (i.e., dense) milieu, mainly concentrated around a few extreme right parties. In contrast, the Italian extreme right network appears to be very fragmented, highly diversified, and difficult to coordinate. The American network appears even more fragmented and dispersed than the Italian one, with many isolated organizations. For example, if political parties are usually of considerable importance when discussing right-wing extremism (since they often maintain various links to violent activists; Minkenberg 1998, 50), the situation in Italy is different in that the virtual community of the extreme right is not focused around a few central organizations that are able to monopolize the communicative exchange within the sector. Political party organizations and political movements emerge as split into different clusters within the net, and they are not considered the main point of reference. The overall density of the network

is 0.07, indicating that only 7 percent of all possible contacts actually exist. The overall network is characterized by a loose chain (especially in comparison with that of the German extreme right). The average distance between the organizations is 2.932, meaning that, on average, the organizations of this network are three nodes (actors) away from each other, and the average degree of 5.3 means that every Italian organization has, on average, just over five links with other organizations. Therefore, many actors can only communicate with each other via long paths. Finally, the online network of the Italian extreme right has a medium level of centralization: Freeman's measure of centralization, which expresses the degree of "inequality" at the level of the in-degrees and out-degrees of the actors, is 19 percent. This structural arrangement of the Italian extreme right does not seem to be conducive to close cooperation among political parties, nor between the political-party side of the Italian extreme right field and the new right youth subcultural side. This is in contrast with the overall configuration of the German extreme right milieu online where, instead, only a few actors occupy a central position—such as the NPD, the free sites, and the organizations that aggregate the local groups—and act as coordination points between the peripheral elements that are rarely directly linked with one another. Indeed, the average distance between German organizations is lower than in Italy (2.45), and the overall density of the network is higher (0.08). Furthermore, as the average degree shows, each organization is connected to a higher number of other organizations compared with the Italian groups (6.1). The centralization measures indicate a higher concentration of power in the German network (an in-degree centralization of 21 percent). Finally, the overall network of the US far right is characterized by an extremely loose chain. The density is very low, 0.01, indicating that very few ties (only 1 percent) among the total possible ties are actually activated by the US organizations, with many isolated nodes. Moreover, there is a strong variation among organizations in the extent to which they engage in building (online) organizational contacts with other groups in the network. The majority (56 percent) have no external links to other US extreme right organizations in our sample; around 10 percent of the groups have one external link, while less than one-third (24 percent) have two or more outgoing links. This means that the different parts of the network (that is, the different sectors of the American extreme right) are not all sufficiently interconnected. Many organizations on the periphery of the network are neither directly connected with the central ones nor, very much, among themselves (the average degree is 1, indicating that every US extreme right organization has, on average, just one link with other organizations). It is therefore difficult to speak of a unified US right-wing sector on the Internet. Finally, the network of the US extreme right has a very low level of centralization (in-degree 11 percent and out-degree 6 percent), which makes it the most horizontal right-wing milieu among the three. What do

these results suggest? A certain degree of organizational weakness of the current extreme right, or a (strategic) form of “leaderless” organizational structure, namely the preference for a form of flexible organization and “resistance”? In the latter case, we may note that the Internet would become a complementary tool for the far right networks, organized with a fluid “membership” that engages in spontaneous and sporadic campaigns of violence. In fact, important right-wing violent events, including the recent attack in Oslo, have been carried out by various “lone wolves,” with often few affiliations to formal organizations but many contacts online (Caiani et al. 2012).

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS 2: NODES

At this level, each actor can be viewed as a focus from which lines radiate to other nodes (actors with which it is linked). In SNA, there are many ways of measuring the centrality of an actor in a network and, therefore, its potential “influence.” The simplest measure of centrality is the number of contacts which an actor receives from the others (in-degree). Those actors who receive information from many sources are considered “prestigious” (Diani 2003b, 307). Another measure is “betweenness,” which measures where a particular actor lies between other nodes in a network. Actors with high “betweenness” scores often serve as gatekeepers and brokers for different parts of the community. They function as important communication channels through which information, goods, and other resources can be transmitted or exchanged (Wasserman and Faust 1994), and they are considered as having a particular influence on the flows of communication (Hanneman 2001, 68). Finally, the “out-degree” of one organization, which counts how many contacts depart from a certain actor, is considered an indicator of a group’s activism in a network and of its willingness to build contacts with other partners. These are important dimensions across which organizations in different countries and movements can be compared.

Analyses on individual nodes (and their networks) have been used to test several effects on individual as well as collective participation (as dependent variables). They include the presence/absence and types of participation (e.g., Diani and Lodi 1988), decisions to jointly participate (e.g., McAdam and Fernandez 1990), and the duration of participation over time (e.g., McPherson and Rotolo 1996). In addition, individual networks have been found to provide the basis for factions and coalitions within and between organizations and for the emergence of leadership (e.g. Diani and Donati 1984). For example, by using empirical evidence on networks between voluntary organizations mobilizing on ethnic minority, environmental, and social exclusion issues in two British cities, Diani and Bison (2004) differentiated between social movement processes and other, similar but distinguished collective

action dynamics. The former are identified when dense informal networks among a multiplicity of actors are built and reproduced, there is a sharing of a collective identity among them, and they engage in social and/or political conflict. To the contrary, where alliances to achieve specific goals are not based on significant identity links, they identify only “coalitional processes,” and finally “organizational processes” are at stake, where collective action is undertaken mostly by specific organizations, rather than with reference to broader, looser networks. Looking at how members of a given movement interact also offered indications of its participatory vs hierarchical nature, the degree of internal division of labor, and the subcultural elements present (Melucci 1984, quoted in Diani 2003a, 9). For example, in his study of Italian environmentalism in the 1980s, focusing on links of exchange of resources, information, and personnel between organizations, Diani (2003b) discovered that the movements were not decentralized nor anti-hierarchical, as social movements networks are considered to be. Rather, the environmental sector was populated by some prominent organizations that—due to their capacity to attract support for specific initiatives and/or to connect the sector’s movement with different stances—were central, or functioned as brokers (Diani 2003b, 117).

In our research on the radical right we looked, through the SNA measures introduced above, at what types of organizations play an important role in the three (online) network communities of the Italian, German, and US extreme right today. We found that in some countries (such as Germany), the right-wing online sector emerges as an arena where the actors endowed with more institutional resources offline, such as political parties, are those most able to succeed (i.e., stand for their high centrality and betweenness). In other countries (such as in Italy), they are clearly the “losers” in term of visibility—at least in the virtual public sphere. Alternatively, in other countries, subcultural youth and cultural movements emerge as particularly prominent in the extreme right milieu, often entering into alliances and exchanges (such as in the United States, Germany, etc.) with the various “souls” of the right radical arena. In general (but not in Italy), the more traditional right (represented by the nostalgic and revisionist groups) emerge as the more marginal actors in right-wing networks and are less engaged in online inter-organizational networking. In terms of cross-country comparison, the explored measures revealed a situation of a higher concentration of power in the European cases than in the United States. However, compared to the Italian organizations, there are more German associations with a high degree of centrality within the sector, showing the German network to be even more concentrated than the Italian one. The distance of the scores between these central actors and the more peripheral ones is also higher in the German case than in Italy. This means that important positions (at least with regard to the flow of communication) are less equally distributed in the German case. In the United

States, the high presence of many isolated organizations reveals a situation of extremely low concentration of power in the far right field. What does this mean in terms of networks' effects? Passy (2003), in her work on private and public ties (e.g., personal friendship, associations, public bodies, etc.) of activists of some Swiss political associations distinguishes between socialization functions of social networks—which “create an initial disposition to participate”; structural-connection functions, generating “practical opportunities for involvement”; and decision-shaping functions, “affecting the ultimate decision to take part.” In the case of our research, our findings may also have some policy implications, in as far as one considers that most of the social and political life of the overall sector might depend on the identity and ideology (e.g., more or less violent) of these prominent organizations.

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS 3: SUBGROUPS

Finally, in SNA we can look at specific patterns of exchanges between and within different subgroups of actors within the entire network. This analysis helps us to observe, in further detail, the specific shape of network patterns across different “sub-nets” of the extreme right milieu. In fact, behind similar measures of cohesion of the whole network, there might be important differences in terms of the concentration of networks/exchanges within and across main subgroups (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). In particular, we can assume that collective action will be easier if dense social ties exist, enabling resources to be more easily shared and a common identity to be built. Vice versa, weak links can lead to processes of “pacification” or “laziness” (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). Network patterns at the subgroup level can be assessed through several measures. First, we can focus on the examination of the *cliques* within the networks. This identifies a set of actors, within the whole network, connected to each other.¹¹ This kind of structure is usually associated with a model of contacts based on a strong “expressive” dimension, and a high investment in the constitution and maintenance of the network (Diani 2003b, 307).

Another tool to analyze subsets of actors within a network is a *block model analysis*, which helps to group together “structurally equivalent” actors (Breiger et al. 1975). This analysis divides the actors of the network into discrete subsets called “blocks,” placing actors within the same block if they have similar relations to all the other actors. Therefore, a group (or block) which is identified in such a way can unify actors who are very different from each other in typological terms (e.g., neo-Nazi groups and right-wing political parties), but which are grouped together by virtue of being similar because of the structure of relations into which they are inserted (i.e., using the words of social capital scholars, if they “hold the same relational resources”). This

is important, since it is considered as influencing the behavior of actors. A “block model” represents the pattern of ties between and within these blocks. In this sense, a block precisely corresponds to a set of structurally equivalent actors which may or may not be a coalition, depending on its internal density. Usually, scholars classify extreme right organizations using “a priori” categories, namely “logic” types into which they group organizations that are similar in terms of ideology (e.g., the “revisionist” organizations) or organizational resources (e.g., political parties vs more informal groups). The advantage of block-model analysis is that it can allow for the classification of the extreme right organizations by (their) “social relations/networks.” In order to interpret the configuration of coalitions, we must look at the *composition of the different blocks and their patterns of exchanges* through the density matrices, which allow us to evaluate the density of relations within and between the blocks of actors.

Ansell (2003, 141ss), looking at the location in movement networks of different types of environmental organizations (i.e., structural equivalence), derived from that their attitude toward collaborative governance. Drawing on historical data concerning protest in Britain from 1828 to 1834, Tilly and Wood (2003, 171) identified block models based on the intersection of actors and events, mapping significant patterns of relationship between attacks and claims among different social groups. Spatial proximity (and the related opportunity for communication) between districts in Sweden have been shown to influence the development of trade unions in the country and social democratic organizations in the past (Hedstrom et al. 2000, quoted in Diani 2003a, 11).

In our research, the social network analysis of subgroups showed us that the configurations of power and the main “coalitions” that are built within the three extreme right online milieus are very different between countries, and have varying degrees and forms of mobilization. The analysis revealed 133 cliques in the case of the German extreme right compared with 80 in the Italian case, despite the similar dimensions of the two networks. This means that many more organizations share mutual contacts in Germany. In other words, there are more subgroups that overlap with one another. A clique configuration appeared as present in the US case between skinheads and neo-Nazis, which we argue can favor collective action. To the contrary, the cleavage between youth subcultural skinhead groups and Christian identity organizations can be related to the relative indifference of skinheads, who are more oriented toward paganism and Celtic myths. This cleavage is not conducive to a common collective mobilization. This was confirmed by the block analysis, which helped to single out four main blocks (coalitions) staying in different relations to each other: the “isolated nodes” (gathering all in one block, detached from the overall network); the cultural block (including mainly cultural/New Age/Catholic integralist groups); and the political

movements and neo-Nazi block (which are the biggest and the most internally homogeneous). Dense (and reciprocal) relations were found in this virtual community only between these two latter blocks. Indeed, as many commentators stress, the American radical right is deeply rooted in, and influenced by, religious values such as those promoted by the Christian identity movement, where its “beliefs are often a commonality shared between the different organizations of the radical right, with members of other organizations such as the KKK and neo-Nazis adhering to [them]” (Bowman-Grieve 2009, 992). Instead, the Christian patriot and racialist right are really two different and separate movements, although there are some commonalities (Bowman-Grieve 2009, 991), as confirmed in our analysis by the clearly decoupled position in the network of the fourth block (composed of militia organizations).

To conclude, the SNA analysis helped us find very different extreme right configurations in the different countries and also to link them to some ideal-types elaborated in social network theory which are considered as endorsing (in terms of networks “effects”) a different impact on the potential for mobilization. Combining the characteristics that have emerged during our analysis, it seems that the Italian extreme right on the Web showed a *policephalous* structure; that is, a structure; that is both centralized and segmented. The German extreme right seemed to assume a configuration that is more similar to the *star* model; that is, a highly centralized structure. The American one—extremely fragmented, little centralized, and with many organizations not linked to each other—resembled a *segmented-decentralized* structure as defined in social network analysis (Diani 2003a, 312). Compared to other kinds of structures, a policephalous network is partially segmented, since the distance between some actors is rather high, and the presence of horizontal links between the peripheral actors demonstrates a desire to participate actively in the political life of the sector without relying exclusively on a small number of central actors. However, the network is also relatively centralized, since some actors engage in contacts more frequently than others and are, thus, in a better position to control the exchanges (relational, cognitive, and so on) within the network. It is worth noting that the level of segmentation of a network reflects the level of the limits imposed on communication among the actors. Thus, segmentation can be ideological whenever the relational distance between the actors increases with the differences in their respective (ideological) positions. Alternatively, it can be based on issues, whenever the factor that divides them is simply represented by differences in the level of interest in specific topics (Diani 2003b, 306). In the star structure, fast and efficient diffusion of communication and information among the various actors is guaranteed (Cinalli 2006). Nevertheless, on the other hand, in such a hierarchical structure it is unlikely that the actors occupying the peripheral positions can exert substantial influence over the

entire network (Diani 2003b, 311). Finally, while a segmented–decentralized structure might not favor collective mobilization, it could be functional to new forms of movement organization. These different configurations that emerged in the three extreme right sectors can be related (as in other works is done, e.g., Cinalli 2004) to the political and cultural opportunities offered to the radical right in the three countries, namely to the different “bundles of legal and political rights” (Cinalli 2004, 21). These factors would account for the different decisions that actors take when shaping their web of ties (for more details, see Caiani and Parenti 2013).

Conclusion to Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis is used to understand the social structure that exists behind a multitude of social phenomena. Network models conceptualize structure (social, economic, political, and so forth) as lasting patterns of relations among actors (Gretzel 2001). Social network analysis has emerged as a key technique in modern sociology, as “the size, diversity and ubiquity of social networks act in combination to necessitate understanding these networks in a systematic manner” (Vaidyanathan et al. 2009, 1).

Nevertheless, several aspects of this approach remain controversial. One common criticism of SNA is that it is too methodological and not theoretical enough. The main division is between those who think that SNA is a specific theory with a specialized method and those who consider it as simply a “method” for a specific type of structural analysis (Schneider 2008). The latter stress that “what is missing is theory building on the role of networks in policy making;” that is, an explicit theory with predictive claims about how particular network conditions result in particular kinds of policy making (Kenis and Rabab 2004, 1, quoted in Schneider 2008). However, as it has been noted, SNA can be considered a “. . . broad intellectual approach, not only narrow set of methods (. . .). Network Analysis implies an asymmetric world view” (Wellman 1988). The general feeling among scholars is that more progress can be made in creating empirical generalizations. However, as it has been noted, “This is not a well-considered argument (. . .), because when examples of network theories are presented, critics say ‘that’s not really a network theory.’ This is natural because theories that account for, say, psychological phenomena, tend to have a lot of psychological content. Theories that account for sociological phenomena have sociological independent variables. Only theories that explain network phenomena tend to have a lot of network content” (Borgatti et al. 2002).

Others, more technically, underline that the real problem of network research (or at least part of it) is its inability to test hypotheses statistically,

because “the data are by their very nature auto-correlated, violating assumptions of independence (random sampling) built in to most classical statistical tests” (Borgatti et al. 2002). Much progress has, however, been made with regard to this aspect, and today several tests have been developed to solve these problems. On the other hand, SNA has many merits, among them an approach perfectly fitting with profound current transformations in society and politics. This includes among others, sectoralization and functional differentiation; overcrowded policy making; decentralization and fragmentation of state; blurring boundaries between private and public governance; informal administrative action; quasi-legislation; soft law; state-sponsored self-regulation; transnationalization of public policy; and international interdependence (Schneider 2008). In particular, with respect to social movement studies, SNA appears to be (a) a perfectly fitting method to approach an increasingly networked society characterized by multiple, overlapping identities and by social movements made by flexible networks of networks, or networks of communication (Bennett 2003); (b) even more expanding as some of the new and promising themes of research in social networks includes processes in online social networks relating to communication and the field of collective actors and online politics. The Internet, for its reticular nature, appears to be a particularly appropriate object to be studied using SNA. Finally, SNA helps to bridge the fields of qualitative/quantitative research in social science. Indeed, as noted, while the quantitative and modeling aspects of SNA are now widely used, the qualitative and ethnographic aspects are still present (Park and Thelwall 2003, quoted in Tateo 2005).

■ NOTES

1. The first systematic study of relational ties can be traced to J. A. Barnes in 1954, who used SNA to study Norwegian fishing crews. For an overview on the history of social network analysis, see Scott 2000, 8ss.
2. <http://www.insna.org/what_is_sna.html> (accessed April 25, 2014).
3. We thank the reviewer for the useful suggestions on this point.
4. SPLC Report. “Rage on the Right: The Year in Hate and Extremism.” *Intelligence Report*, Spring 2010, Issue Number: 137; available at (<<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/rage-on-the-right>>, accessed April 4, 2014).
5. We have used the UCINET 6 software for this analysis.
6. Q.1: Which organizations on this list have (ORGNAME) tried to influence others over the last five years? Please use the numbers on the list for your answers.
 Q.2: Now look at the list once again. With which organizations on the list have you (ORGNAME) closely collaborated over the last five years?
 Q.3: Please, look at the list one more time. With which of these organizations did you have some major disagreements over the last five years?

7. The list of radical right organizations is compiled using publications of the most important watchdog organizations in the selected countries, among them the US Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Centre, the Italian Osservatorio Democratico, etc., institutional reports (e.g., the TE-SAT yearly reports) and news reports.
8. Namely a separate page or dedicated section specifically for links to other websites.
9. For the inclusion of an organization in our sample of “radical right-wing organizations,” we relied on the self-definition of the group and the predominant nature of the message transmitted through the website.
10. The right-wing website collection and links codification was conducted for the Italian case between June and December 2008, for the Spanish case between March and June 2009, and for the American case between August 2009 and January 2010. For all the other cases, website collection and links codification was conducted between January and February 2011.
11. A clique is defined as a subgroup within which all the components share mutual ties (namely, all the possible ties are activated).

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16 Methodological Practices in Social Movement Online Research

Lorenzo Mosca

Introducing Online Methods: A Missing Reflection in the Literature

Reflection on the use of online methods in studying activism and social movements has been quite limited until now. This is probably related to the fact that in this field online research has often complemented offline investigation, and the relationship between the two has not been particularly problematized. However, because of the growing role of the Internet¹ in mobilizing protest and even changing its logic and organizational forms (Bennett 2003; Bimber 2003; Chadwick 2007; Bennett et al. 2012; Juris 2012), this discussion can be extremely worthwhile. Indeed, the Internet facilitates individualized identities—diffuse, reticular, and fragmented movements; issue networks; and loose coalitions, as well as novel forms of social aggregation being the material infrastructure of new forms of contentious politics (Castells 2001).

When discussing online methods, a clear distinction emerges between studies considering the Internet as a source of information, and inquiries seeing it as an object of study (Rogers 2009). In the first case, documents, comments, posts, and tweets on individual blogs, websites, and social media profiles of groups and activists can be accessed in order to collect information on their history, claims, organization, actions, and other characteristics. However, their online presence can also be studied per se in order to shed light on interactions taking place online, on movement communicative practices, on the role of the Internet in shaping (and being shaped by) organizational and democratic practices, on framing and mobilizing processes, and so on.

Even if they do not consider the Internet as an object of study but simply as a source, scholars should be more reflexive on the kind of data they collect online. The Internet is in fact a peculiar source of information that presents particular challenges in terms of archiving and sampling. It is worth noting that the number of publications addressing the use of digital media in social

movements has markedly increased during the past decade (i.e. Van de Donk et al. 2004; Garrett 2006; Gillan et al. 2008; Gerbaudo 2012; Mattoni 2012a; Caiani and Parenti 2013). However, there have been only a few recent efforts (Earl and Kimport 2011) addressing, at least partially, the issue of online methods. It is also worth underlining that handbooks specifically devoted to methods for social movement research do not take into account the issue of online methods per se. The present chapter thus aims to fill this gap in the literature.

While social movement studies have not dedicated enough attention to online methods, there are plenty of publications in the social sciences that provide useful insights when reflecting on online methods for studying collective action. Some focus on specific techniques (e.g., digital ethnography), while others address both quantitative and qualitative online methods.

On a more general level of abstraction, Consalvo and Ess noted that the offline/online divide has been bypassed in recent reflection. As they observe, “internet studies are no longer constrained by certain dualisms prevailing in the 1990s—specifically, strong dichotomies presumed to hold between such *relata* as the offline and the online in parallel with ‘the real’ and ‘the virtual,’ and, most fundamentally from a philosophical perspective, between a material body and a radically distinct, disembodied mind” (2011, 3).

Building on recent discussion on online methods in the social sciences, this chapter will: (a) discuss methodological problems related to archiving online data; (b) address sampling problems in research on the online dimension of social movements; and (c) present an overall picture of online methods for researching movements, also discussing the pros and cons of specific techniques.

Before Entering the (Online) Field: How to Archive Web Data

One of the first problems a researcher faces when doing research on the Internet refers to the archiving of online data. The volatile nature of the medium makes any type of content extremely unstable and potentially vanishing from one day to another. The picture is even more complicated since the advent of the so-called “Web 2.0.” Besides providing more opportunities for direct participation of users in the creation of online content generally hosted on commercial platforms, the label “Web 2.0” indicates a shift from the static and mostly written contents of “Web 1.0” to audiovisual contents (Chadwick 2009) that are more difficult to archive and even more problematic to analyze. While user-generated contents have important visual components

(banners, posters, photos, video, and so on), the issue of visual analysis is not specific to online research but certainly acquired a greater importance with Web 2.0, as these contents are now widely available and more visible. If visual analysis in social movement studies has often been neglected, it has been addressed in more recent reflection (Doerr et al. 2013) and will not be touched upon in what follows (but see Doerr and Milman 2014).

Archiving of online contents is needed “in order to have a stable object to study and refer to when the analysis is to be documented” (Brügger 2011, 24). In what follows, we focus in particular on “micro-archiving” by individual researchers. Archiving difficulties relate to the differing depth of the archiving effort, which can vary from a portion of the websphere² (all web resources related to a specific event or an issue), from a website to a webpage or an individual webelement (that is, an image on a webpage). Archiving can be done in two main ways: automatically or manually. The automatic retrieval of information generally applies to the first two types of archive (websphere portion or websites) and is done employing software that crawls the net according to certain parameters set by the researcher (i.e., Earl and Kimport 2011). Automatic archiving can be done using various software (e.g., the htrack website copier is free software available online). However, this entails a series of choices and limitations that have to be taken into account: a) you have to decide the depth of the crawling and whether you want to also download non-textual elements; and b) the download is always far from creating a perfect copy of the websphere or the websites one wants to archive because of broken links as well as elements not recognized by crawlers.

In the case of manual archiving, this can be done simply by saving a webpage in html format, by transforming it into an image (screenshot) or PDF, or by downloading the webelements embedded in it. There are, however, many software programs allowing manual archiving that can be proprietary or open source, free or for payment. One of the most widely used in academic research is the open source and free software Zotero (<<http://www.zotero.org>>, accessed April 5, 2014), developed since 2006 by the Center for History and New Media of George Mason University as a tool for the browser Firefox. Zotero is particularly useful in that it allows the creation of a personal library with all relevant elements that can be easily catalogued, ordered, associated, and commented upon. Another free and open source application of Firefox, Navicrawler, collects data while surfing the net and creates graphs, making it possible to explore the web like a physical territory. Depending on the research focus, webarchiving can produce very different datasets made up of texts, images, relational data (i.e., links), metadata, and other elements that provide a simplified image of online communication.

One should always consider that generally the quality of archived materials is inversely proportional to the depth of archiving. If the research focuses on

a limited number of websites, blogs, and profiles on social media selected in advance, then the (manual) archiving process is often accompanied by a quality control, while in automatic archiving higher quantity tends to translate into lower quality, as the researcher cannot check all archived materials and fix all problems related to them (Brügger 2011, 28).

However, social media has made the websphere even more complex and fragmented, rendering webarchiving a more challenging task. First, the problem of “big data” requires huge hardware space and processing power. Second, data download from social media can be only partially automated. Last but not least, archiving such data also raises sensitive privacy issues (see Milan 2014) and is often neglected or seriously constrained by the terms of service of social media.

A resource that can be accessed online when aiming to collect longitudinal information is the Internet archive (<<http://www.archive.org>>, accessed April 5, 2014), a non-profit digital library created in 1996. It can be consulted when aiming to study the changes occurring in a website over time. For example, in accessing the website of the European Social Forum (<<http://www.fse-esf.org>>, accessed April 5, 2014), one immediately realizes that the links to the different editions of the event no longer work, as the domain was not renovated by its owners. In this case, the Internet archive allows one to go back to the websites of the previous editions. However, when doing so, one suddenly realizes that archived materials are far from being complete and accurate because of the already mentioned problems related to automatic archiving. While the Internet archive and similar digital libraries can be a useful resource (although far from flawless) for keeping memory of static elements of Web 1.0 (like websites), Web 2.0 applications entail greater challenges from the archiving point of view.

Although scholars disagree on the quantity and quality of the contribution provided by social media to the uprisings of the “Arab Spring” (i.e., Aouragh and Alexander 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest 2011; Lotan et al. 2011), they tend to agree on the important role played by these platforms in such mobilization processes. As noted by Hanna,

data from social media such as Facebook and Twitter may allow researchers to avoid the problems associated with newspaper and recall bias. Instead of only getting data from mobilization events that the press considers newsworthy, we can receive reports from activists in real time. Similarly, instead of doing retrospective interviews with movement activists, we can often observe their self-reported activity from real-time data. Obviously, these data present new biases—only activists with enough technical know-how and economic capital will be frequent users of social media for movement purposes. But these biases are known and possibly systematic enough to be addressed with methodological techniques. (2013, 285)

Facebook and Twitter are the most widespread Web 2.0 platforms; they present, however, different characteristics. Because of its specific features

(asymmetric relations among users and adoption of a peculiar syntax³), Twitter has been considered a functional equivalent of a public square, while Facebook has been seen as a “walled garden.” Facebook (which, differently from Twitter, is based on symmetric relations among users) can illuminate internal debates of contemporary mobilization, although going beyond public profiles of groups and well-known activists and entering inner circles is not always possible; while Twitter may provide information on wider populations interested in discussing a specific topic and allow us to reconstruct such dynamics. Nonetheless, at present there is no public and accessible archive of tweets (although the American Library of Congress is engaged in its development) and, because of platform restrictions neglecting sharing of archived data, one can only consult a very limited number of tweets (about 1,500) in a very strict time frame (around one week).⁴ These limitations mean that research on Twitter has to be done just when social phenomena happen and cannot be repeated. Despite these limitations, an online tool that can help in collecting the tweets of a specific account is available at <<http://www.twimemachine.com>>(accessed April 5, 2014), while Netvizz is a Facebook application allowing content scraping and generating statistics of public profiles and pages (Rieder 2013).

Sampling Strategies in Studying Social Movements on the Net

Defining a social movement as a network of mostly informal interactions between groups and individuals (della Porta and Diani 2006) means that the actors taking part in the phenomenon cannot be easily identified. The operational definition of this concept refers both to organized actors (parties, unions, NGOs, associations, social centres, less formalized groups and so on, generally referred to as Social Movements Organizations—SMOs) and individuals (leaders, brokers, spokespersons, activists, members, sympathizers, and others).

Sampling strategies acquire dramatic importance in studies focusing on unknown populations like those of (collective and individual) participants in social movement activities and protests. Research on social movements has always struggled to detect methods to overcome the lack of exhaustive lists of actors in protests. The emergence of a new domain of borderless contention, like the online sphere, that is strictly intertwined with the offline environment makes sampling even more problematic.

Let us start our discussion by considering recent studies in the field of social movements and how they faced and tried to solve issues of sampling,

representativity, and generalizability of findings when dealing with the online dimension. In fact, changing sampling strategies clearly influences the final findings of research projects.

One of the first and more systematic studies focused on the Europeanization of the public sphere, and questioned the Internet as an opportunity for resource-poor actors like social movements. The research addressed the main actors of public discourse in various policy fields in seven countries, comparing online and offline communicative arenas.⁵

The authors distinguished two ways of accessing political communication on the Internet: a) by way of search engines (vertical selection), creating a hierarchical sample of relevant websites on a search issue defined by the Internet user; and b) by way of hyperlinks (horizontal selection), by following links between websites (Koopmans and Zimmermann 2010, 173).

The first stage of the project entailed coders manually looking for specific keywords in national search engines⁶ and identifying relevant results and the main actors of claim making in the different policy fields. The second stage of the research concerned automated hyperlink analysis by a web crawler that covered the websites of the main actors identified in the first stage. The software collected over four million links on around 1,000 websites that were then inspected through a network analysis (Zimmermann et al. 2004, 14).

Concerning this selection strategy, the authors found that the gatekeeping logic of search engines mimics mainstream media logic: “although offline and online mechanisms of selection diverge strongly, their outcomes are very similar, both when we look at the distribution among actors of varying institutional power and when we look at the visibility of actors of different geopolitical scopes” (Koopmans and Zimmermann 2010, 181). In a nutshell, the research confirmed the existence of a “power law” showing that institutional domestic actors are more visible than social movements in the online public sphere, with limited differences when compared to offline print media. As they note: “our main finding is that the hierarchies of visibility that emerge in these two communicative arenas are very similar” (Koopmans and Zimmermann 2010, 193). This means that search engines tend to underrepresent social movements when using keywords not directly referring to protest.

In a recent contribution, Earl (2013) discusses different sampling strategies for examining movements and their relationships with the Internet, comparing the results of three different studies on the online dimension of social movements. These present a certain degree of variation in time and space (Table 16.1). In fact, they were completed between 2005 and 2006; but while two concerned exclusively or predominantly the United States, the other addressed six European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK) and the transnational level. The focus of such studies shifted from the Global Justice Movement (GJM) (della Porta and Mosca

2009) to a wide array of different movements: 6 in the case of Stein's study (2009) and 20 in Earl and Kimport's research (2011).

The three studies were based on different sampling strategies: the definition of a purposive sample in the study on the GJM, and random sampling in the other two studies.

The purposive sample is built on the basis of researchers' knowledge of the phenomenon under study. In our research on the GJM (intended as a convergence space for various social movement families remobilized or mobilized anew), we focused on the websites of the most relevant (not the largest, but the most "representative") SMOs involved in the movement in the countries under study. The selection was facilitated by the fact that some of the most relevant groups in each country had already been identified in the first stage of the project, which focused on the emergence of the GJM within pre-existing national social movement families (della Porta 2007). To complement such information, lists of organizations that signed calls for action for social forums and other important movement events were collected and used to single out the groups belonging to the "core" of the GJM's networks. According to the mentioned criteria, a list of relevant actors to be used as a model by national teams was generated, while allowing for differences between the national cases to be taken into account.⁷ In the end, lists were compiled using the following guideline: to select at least 20 websites of organizations mobilized on specific issues and belonging to the GJM; and at least 10 websites of groups reflecting the national characteristics of the movement. Each team identified and analyzed between 30 and 43 websites of networks/organizations, for a total of 261 websites (della Porta and Mosca 2005).

The sampling strategy was different in the research by Stein and by Earl and Kimport: while the former relied on a list of groups included in the US *Encyclopedia of Associations*, randomly extracting from it and looking for their websites, the latter took a random sample of the search engine results from a series of keywords related to different movements. Earl and Kimport's sampling method was genuinely focused on the online sphere, while della Porta and Mosca's and Stein's studies proceeded from the offline to the online. Moreover, they both sampled SMOs, while Earl and Kimport's strategy achieved a wider coverage of informal networks and unconventional actions. As a consequence, della Porta and Mosca's⁸ and Stein's research underrepresented online actions and overrepresented SMO-run websites facilitating offline activism (Earl 2013).

The different sampling strategies entail diverse shortcomings and have different capacity to generalize on findings (see again Table 16.1). Earl's strategy is time consuming, as many results are irrelevant and have to be disregarded, as in the already mentioned research on the Europeanization of the public sphere. Moreover, it requires the allocation of significant resources.

Table 16.1 Different Sampling Strategies in Three Studies on Social Movements Online

	della Porta & Mosca	Stein	Earl & Kimport
When	2005	2006	2006
Where	Six European countries and the transnational level	United States	Predominantly United States
Who	GJM families	6 movements	20 movements
Sampling strategy	Purposive (based on deep knowledge of the phenomenon)	Random sample of offline groups included in the US <i>Encyclopedia of Associations</i> (EA)	Random sample of search engine results (using keywords)
Sampling logic	Departing from (offline) organizations (although lists were generated in different ways)		Departing from (online) contents
Main differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overrepresentation of SMO-run websites – Underrepresentation of online actions 		Wider coverage of online protests and informal networks (non-SMOs)
Main limits	Researcher knowledge could miss relevant online activities	The EA includes mostly large and well-established SMOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Resource- and time consuming – Supposedly lower quality of archived materials
Generalization	No	Only to the specific population covered by EA	Yes

Source: Own elaboration from Earl 2013.

Because of automatic retrieval of online contents, archived contents present lower quality (see previous section “Before Entering the (Online) Field: How to Archive Web Data”). However, this procedure is particularly remarkable as it allows generalization to the population of online contention. As for della Porta and Mosca, the purposive sample of offline SMOs could have missed relevant online activities (which in fact appear slightly underrepresented if compared to Earl and Kimport’s results). This procedure is based on a non-probability sample that does not allow generalizations and works better for exploratory research or as part of a multi-method approach. Stein’s strategy presents analogous limits: it relies on a directory of offline SMOs that tend to include well-established groups and to ignore younger and more informal groupings. Thus, the generalization capacity of this procedure is limited to a specific population of SMOs.

Entering the Web-Field: Online Methods for Researching Social Movements

After discussing archiving and sampling strategies, we now turn to different online methods for researching social movements. According to Jensen (2011), old methods retain much of their salience in contemporary Internet studies. As the Internet is strongly embedded in our (and activists’) everyday lives (Wellman 2011) and not radically divorced from social movements’ offline activities, it can be approached through a wide range of familiar and established methodologies. In fact, traditional methods for studying social movements can greatly benefit from the Internet. However, as Rogers observed, “there is an ontological distinction between the natively digital and the digitized; that is, between the objects, content, devices and environments ‘born’ in the new medium, as opposed to those which have ‘migrated’ to it” (2009, 5). This also has clear implications for methods for Internet research. In fact, on the one side there is the idea that offline methods can be easily imported, remediated, and simply digitalized without facing particular challenges. On the other side, researchers are invited to “follow the medium,” capture its dynamics, and learn from the medium the method itself (Rogers 2009).

Although not at all exhaustive of all studies in the field, I have classified according to the prevailing dimension of the research focus recent publications concerning social movements, activism, and protest that have used the Internet either as a source or as a research object. The focus of these publications can be roughly divided into: a) attitudes and values; b) behavior and action; c) organizational processes (see Table 16.2). While some of these studies are based on consolidated research techniques in the field—such as protest event analysis (PEA) and social network analysis (SNA)—that have been expanded by using the Internet as an additional source of information, other studies have looked at the relationship between Internet and movements as research object per se in an effort to understand if and how it alters organizational and democratic practices, mobilizing structures, framing processes,

Table 16.2 Internet in Social Movement Studies

Research focus	Internet as a source	Internet as a research object
Identity/attitudes/values	Reiter 2009	Wall 2007 Kavada 2009
Behavior/action	Almeida & Lichbach 2003	Earl & Kimport 2009 Fisher & Boekkooi 2010 Mosca 2010
Organizational processes	Garrido & Halavais 2003	Juris 2012 Theocharis 2013

and repertoires of action, as well as looking at processes of social appropriation, shaping, and adaptation of the Internet to protest needs. Main methods adopted in such studies as well as chief substantive results are briefly illustrated in what follows.

The choice of different methods depends very much on the research focus and how this combines with the attention to the Internet: attitudes toward participation have been studied by Reiter (2009), who analyzed founding documents of GJM groups and networks mostly retrieved online. Behavior and action have also been studied, enriching PEA with online information and applying SNA to hyperlinks. Using the Web as an additional source for PEA (see Hutter 2014), Almeida and Lichbach (2003) found that activist-based websites are less affected by selection bias as they tend to cover transnational protest events (e.g., anti-WTO mobilizations) more than conventional media sources, being less sensitive to protests' "intensive characteristics" (events being spectacular, violent, massive, and long-lasting). Garrido and Halavais (2003) studied the networks of support for the Zapatista movement, applying the SNA to hyperlinks.

Both Wall (2007) and Kavada (2009) focused on the use of mailing lists by movements and their relationship with collective identities through content and discourse analysis of e-mails. Using a random sample of search engine results, Earl and Kimport (2009) found that the Internet has facilitated the diffusion of protest tactics beyond the typical social movement milieu, being increasingly employed by groups of fans seeking cultural change instead of political or social transformation. Other studies mixing participant observation, surveys, interviews, and the analysis of digital platforms have focused on the role of the Internet in mobilizing unaffiliated participants (cfr. Mercea 2012). As noted by Fisher and Boekkooi in commenting on survey results, "the internet mobilizes mostly isolated individuals who are not personally connected to a wider circle of people with whom they engage in social movement activity" (2010, 204). Mosca (2010) has looked at the political use of the Internet by individuals and organizations of the GJM using surveys, interviews, and website analysis to show the strengths and weaknesses of employing the Internet in movements' everyday life.

In his suggestion "to follow the medium" and its operative logics, Rogers (2010) developed the "issue crawler," software that singles out the characteristics of thematic networks online through a co-link analysis. This software was designed to shed light on thematic clusters of websites and blogs but is less useful for research on social media.

Research on Web 2.0 platforms and collective action is still in its infancy. However, scholars have started to focus on specific case studies, comparing them with previous waves of mobilization. The Arab Spring, the *Indignados*, and Occupy Wall Street (OWS) have attracted most of the attention, although few scholars have looked at these phenomena through the lens of social

movement studies. Collecting data from Facebook, Hanna (2013) applied computer-aided content analysis methods to mobilization patterns of Egypt's youth movement of 2009. Adopting an ethnographic approach, Juris (2012) compared the GJM and OWS, stressing different cultural logics facilitated by the use of diverse online platforms. While websites facilitated complex communicative exchange, interaction, and coordination at the organizational level in the GJM, social media enabled microbroadcasting by individuals through ego-centered networks. If the networking logic of Web 1.0 favored the coordination of collective actors (organizational networks) that were already constituted in the first case, the aggregative logic of Web 2.0 mobilized crowds of individuals (interpersonal networks), which disaggregate as easily as they aggregate in the second one. While protest can be rapidly convened, its sustainability becomes problematic over time if physical places to meet are missing (like in the case of post-evictions) and it proves difficult to create long-lasting solidarities and forge collective identities (Diani 2011).

In another study addressing activism and Web 2.0 platforms, Theocharis (2013) used SNA to analyze the internal dynamics of the 2010 university occupation in the UK. Focusing specifically on Twitter, he observed how it facilitates a real-time shaping of protest tactics based on information on the position of the police that demonstrators received during rallies through interactive maps. Moreover, because of information redundancy on Twitter, once well-connected accounts were cut off, the activists' communication circuit was not significantly damaged.

Although Table 16.2 attempts to classify them into mutually exclusive categories, many of the studies reviewed here must be seen on a continuum, as they are generally based on research designs that include multiple methods applied both online and offline, and address several dimensions of social movement analysis. Let us now focus briefly on some quantitative and qualitative techniques for studying the online dimension of social movements.

Quantitative Research Online: Pros and Cons of Online Surveys

Among quantitative methods, this section focuses in particular on the online survey as compared to other types of survey, as this seems to be a rewarding technique for collecting data on protest and mobilization. An online survey can serve as a mere source of information on individuals, or it can be used for studying the Internet as a research object, depending on the items included in a questionnaire. The decision to investigate a certain population through an online survey depends very much on the type of information one wishes

to collect and on a series of constraints, including the specific characteristics of the population one wants to study.

Despite the fact that recent reflection on survey techniques in social movement studies has developed quasi-random sampling strategies for interviewing participants in social movement protest events (Walgrave and Wagemann 2012), quantitative studies on collective action have always faced sampling problems related to the absence of exhaustive lists of participants in protest events and lists of supporters of social movements.

Comparing the online survey with other types of surveys makes evident the strengths and weaknesses of this method (Table 16.3). Online surveys are certainly the cheapest method: costs for setting up the questionnaire online can vary, but are clearly compensated by the fact that the researcher saves on printing, mail, interviewer, and data-entry costs. Cheap software (i.e., SurveyMonkey) are available for hosting questionnaires, collecting answers online, and storing them in a dataset. As for response rate, one should take into consideration that compared to other types of survey, the online method makes refusal extremely easy—the return rate is estimated between 5 and 10 percent—as the invitation to fill in a questionnaire, which is generally advertised online or sent by e-mail or via social media, can be simply ignored by the receiver. This means that an online survey must take seriously into consideration the size of the targeted group and should be ruled out for populations limited to a few hundred individuals. Like other survey methods (except for face-to-face interviews), the online survey fits well for geographically dispersed populations. Another strength of these surveys relates to their capacity to collect data in a limited span of time (e.g., one month), second only to telephone interviews. Online surveys are well equipped to overcome the problem of socially desirable responses and acquiescence, as they grant the anonymity of respondents. Sensitive information can be better collected because

Table 16.3 Comparison of Survey Methods

Characteristics	Mail	Telephone	Face-to-face	Online
Cost	Limited	Medium	High	Low
Response rate	Low	Medium	High	Low
Geographic reach	Wide	Wide	Limited	Wide
Response period	Lengthy	Fast	Very lengthy	Quite fast
Sensitive questions	Yes	No	No	Yes
Complexity of questions	Limited	Limited	Yes	Limited
Direct data entry	No	Yes (by the interviewer)	No	Yes (by the interviewee)
Length of the interview	Low	Low	High	Low
Inference	Limited	High	Limited	Limited

Source: Own elaboration from Sue and Ritter 2007, 7.

of the absence of an interviewer. The complexity of questions as well as the length of interviews should be limited, although online surveys generally allow respondents to decide autonomously the timing of filling in the questionnaire, without the obligation to complete it in a fixed time frame. Online surveys also allow filtering questions automatically, avoiding the possibility of interviewees answering the wrong ones. Moreover, the nonresponse rate is lower than, or similar to, the rate in mail surveys, and the number of words recorded for open-ended questions tends to be higher (Sue and Ritter 2007, 9).

Obviously, the most important weakness of this type of survey concerns the limited representativity of the population, which makes inferences very problematic. Thus, instead of using online surveys for generalizing results, one should only compare specific groups (e.g., unaffiliated versus affiliated respondents or members of different groups) within the participants in the survey.

As Sue and Ritter observed, “Online surveys are an effective mode of survey administration when dealing with closed populations, when probability sampling is not essential, and when the target respondents have access to the necessary computer technology” (2007, 149).

One should consider that there are at least three nonprobability sampling strategies that can be employed for online surveys (Sue and Ritter 2007, 32–4):

- a) *Convenience sampling* includes self-selected respondents in online surveys that are not representative of any population and that generally participate as they have a particular interest in the topic of the survey. This sampling strategy does not allow any inference to be made.
- b) The *snowball sample* is hardly representative of any general population and is normally used when focusing on hard-to-reach populations. This sampling strategy works best with small populations where the members know each other. It can be used to select members of very defined populations.
- c) *Volunteer opt-in panels* are based on groups of individuals who volunteered to participate in periodic surveys. They are usually recruited through advertising (generally online), and their demographic characteristics are collected when they register. With proper statistical corrections, they can be approximated to populations of interest.

Online surveys could be administered, for instance, to the followers of a certain movement on social media. A recent study by Bartlett et al. (2013) has focused on the Facebook fans of Beppe Grillo’s five-star movement. Compared to face-to-face surveys with participants in protest events, which have a long tradition in social movement studies (see Andretta and della Porta 2014), the advantage of the online survey consists in the possibility of exploring groups involved in the movement in various ways: not just activists mobilized in the

streets, but also sympathizers with varying degrees of support for the movement. This could be a way to inspect how a specific sector of public opinion sympathetic with a movement and wider than the population of activists perceive it, and to inquire into the potential mobilizing structure of a movement beyond SMOs.

Doing Qualitative Research Online: Digital Ethnography

Among qualitative methods, this section focuses in particular on digital ethnography—intended as a mix of online methods including, among others, participant observation and interviews with informants. It has been noted that “pioneering ethnographic studies of online environments tended to stress the importance of understanding online social life in its own right. This was, in part, a reaction against ‘deficit models’ which stressed the impoverishment of online interactions as compared to those in face-to-face settings [. . .] the development of approaches to take account of the multiple connections which suffuse online contexts has been informed by notions of multi-sited ethnography which became prominent in anthropology in the 1990s” (Hine 2008, 259, 267). In the same vein, Kendall observes that “in recent research on community and the internet, the emphasis is shifting from ethnographic studies of virtual communities to studies of people’s blending of offline and online contacts” (2011, 320).

In online participant observation, the ethnographer basically faces the same dilemmas that concern the “traditional” ethnographer (see Balsiger and Lambelet 2014). The equilibrium between observation and participation is always precarious and challenging. On the one side, a full participant is better equipped to describe a certain phenomenon, but she is also at risk of sharing the cultural horizon of the group and dismissing her critical point of view; on the other side, a full observer is more detached and more able to critically engage with the research object, but she could miss an in-depth understanding of it as well as interactions with members that may help in testing emerging concepts and interpretations (Hine 2008, 261–3). However, the online realm offers researchers more opportunities for observing movements without mentioning their real identities. While simple online observation (lurking) in the early stage of research can be the best way to familiarize oneself with the phenomenon and to facilitate entry into the field, ethical conduct must guide the researcher, who should soon make clear and explicit the aims of her research, being very careful to safeguard the privacy of people under study (see Milan 2014). Limiting observation to the digital

environment and ignoring what is happening offline is risky. Reflection on digital ethnography has shown that the best solution to increase reliability of findings consists in multiple forms of observation and interaction, both offline and online. The continuum between the offline and online environments needs to be constantly crossed in order to make sense of contemporary collective action. In a study by Juris et al. (2013) on the struggles related to software and technology in the social forum process, analysis was enriched by the adoption of a multi-sited ethnography that cut across the online/offline boundaries, moving from face-to-face communication to digital interactions and vice-versa, showing different aspects of the same process. Nonetheless, as noted by Mattoni (2012b), the two dimensions can clash and thus require close inspection and comparison. As it is not always easy for a researcher to bridge these spaces—giving them the right weight and inhabiting both effectively—the risk exists of grasping an unfocused image of a phenomenon that can be either limited to an abstract and a-geographical sphere (the Web) or to a particular community that is physically located.

Concerning online qualitative interviews, they should also ideally be complemented with offline interviews (see della Porta 2014). However, as Orgad noted, “conducting offline interactions with informants should not be driven by the assumption that the offline interaction would reveal more authentic or more accurate information than that generated by online interaction. Rather, the rationale for combining offline and online interactions with informants should be grounded in the research context and its goals” (2005, 52–3). Building relationships with interviewees requires trust that is not easy to generate online because disembodied, anonymous, and textual settings do not facilitate conditions of mutual confidence (Hine 2008). For instance, social movement activists could suspect that an e-mail request for information hides surveillance efforts by police forces. How could this risk be overcome? The researcher should introduce herself using her institutional e-mail account. One should also consider that with Web 2.0, tracks of our online identity and relationships are easily accessible, as well as information on our work activity and on our scientific production. Researchers’ profiles on social media can reassure unknown activists (showing them that they share friends and political opinions), but they can also be counterproductive when they display significant differences between the two (e.g., imagine a study focusing on extreme right activists developed by a leftist researcher, or vice-versa). If trust building is necessary to start a relationship, the temporal dimension of interactions is also important: prompt replies to informants’ online requests proves the researcher’s serious commitment to the project and demonstrates real interest in listening to informants’ accounts. When a certain level of trust has been achieved, there is always the risk of “going native.” In order to circumvent it, Orgad suggests maintaining a certain degree of detachment and avoiding sharing personal information with informants (2005, 57).

Interestingly, a possible inconsistency has been noted between online and offline interviews. It is not only that informants who are open, cooperative, fluent, and lucid in online interactions can be closed, shy, incoherent, and unclear during face-to-face interviews. The opposite is also true: informants whose online communication is poor and condensed can provide extremely rich and expressive face-to-face communication (Orgad 2005, 59).

Compared to online interactions, the limited control over face-to-face interviews opens up the research agenda to new ideas that would otherwise not have been raised. At the same time, online communication may help the reflexive work of activists beyond extemporaneous face-to-face interaction (Hine 2008). In sum, “combining online and offline interactions with informants, enhances the ways in which researchers are positioned in relation to their informants, and the ways they comes to know them” (Orgad 2005, 62).

Concluding: Back to the Offline

In this chapter I have addressed online methods for the study of social movements. While such methods are generally employed in empirical research, the reflection on the limits and opportunities they entail has been very limited until now, and in general their relationship with offline techniques has been poorly discussed and problematized.

I first focused on a decision the researcher has to make before entering the field: how to collect and archive data that are constitutively evanescent, rapidly changing, and at risk of disappearing. Archiving procedures are far from generating an exact copy of the portion of the websphere one wants to explore, but they grant transparency, and repeatability of the research, as well as the possibility of checks from other researchers (Brügger 2011).

I then presented various sampling strategies for researching the online dimension of social movements, illustrating attempts to move research from isolated case studies to alternative sampling techniques. With reference to recent research in the field, I discussed the strengths and weaknesses of different choices, focusing in particular on purposive samples and random samples.

In the final sections of this chapter, I have tried to shed light on different methods for online research on social movements. In fact, traditional techniques are still useful for doing online research. They can be expanded using the Web as an alternative source of information; but they can also be complemented by developing new research techniques that focus on the Web per se.

As a possible alternative to traditional surveys, I discussed the pros and cons of online surveys: they are inexpensive and relatively fast but still weakened by their basis in non-probability samples. However, their interest lies

in the ability to reach a different population compared to traditional surveys in social movement studies. I also briefly discussed digital ethnography and other qualitative methods, stressing the need for crossing the offline/online divide in doing research. In fact, as we have seen, earlier studies on the Web considered these realms as detached. Current studies have to cope with the awareness of the Internet as being part of our everyday life and with continuity between online and offline environments, which requires frequent transitions from one to another in doing research.

In conclusion, it is clear that we need offline data to interpret online social and political dynamics; but it is equally true that offline phenomenon would be impossible to understand without seriously studying the online environment. As we tend to focus on mobilization phenomena that are constructed both online and offline, it is crucial to access both fields where participants act. This means that in order to provide robustness to our findings, data need to be triangulated. Triangulation has often been conceived as mixing quantitative and qualitative methods (della Porta and Keating 2008). The online sphere adds a further challenge to researchers of contemporary phenomena: beyond mixing qualitative and quantitative data, researchers should triangulate offline and online techniques in a multi-layered research design.

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■ NOTES

1. In this chapter I use the term “the Internet” for the sake of simplicity, but it is important to deconstruct the notion of “the Internet” as a coherent medium, as it is a constellation of different platforms and applications working differently (e-mail, hyperlinks, websites, chats, forums, blogs, search engines, social networks, and so on).
2. In the words of Schneider and Foot, a websphere should be intended “as not simply a collection of websites, but as a set of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple websites [and Web 2.0 platforms] deemed relevant or related to a central event, concept, or theme, and often connected by hyperlinks. The boundaries of a websphere are delimited by a shared topical orientation and a temporal framework” (2005, 158).
3. The three pillars of current “Twitter” syntax are hashtags (#), mentions (@), and retweets (RT), which serve to add basic information to messages of 140 characters or less. These features allow framing the message, directing it at a specific user, and sharing, endorsing,

or criticizing comments made by other users. Moreover, “trending topics” give a sense of the issues at the top of its users’ agenda. This peculiar syntax is not present on Facebook, although its management is trying to gradually introduce it.

4. The Application Programming Interface (API) allows access to public information available on social media. However, in order to collect additional data an authorization is needed from social network platforms. Twitter Inc., for instance, has given some scholars access to data that would otherwise not have been available. Considering the positive media coverage Twitter obtains for supposedly advancing democracy in the world, its management could be interested in working with social movement scholars, too.
5. The project involved scholars in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, and focused on the following policy domains: regulation of livestock farming; monetary (currency) politics; humanitarian aid and military interventions; asylum and refugee politics; retirement and pension schemes; culture promotion (<<http://europub.wzb.eu>>, accessed April 5, 2014).
6. At the time of the research (2002), Google was still far from practically monopolizing the market of web searching.
7. In order to collect comparable data, we covered SMOs focusing upon different issues (environment, peace, women’s rights, labor issues, solidarity, gay rights, migrant and human rights, etc.). Different kinds of media websites close to the GJM were also selected as actively engaged in the movement (periodical magazines, radios, newspapers, and networks of independent communication). In those countries where they were present, websites of local social forums were also included in the sample.
8. However, the research employed a multi-method design, and attention to the individual level (and to its relation with digital media) was the specific object of another workpackage (<<http://demos.eui.eu>>, accessed April 5, 2014).

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17 Working with Images

Nicole Doerr and Noa Milman

When applied to social movement research, we can define visual analysis as the developing concepts and methods used to analyze physical, representational, and public visibility elements that exist in social movements (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013). Visual analysis extends primarily to three aspects of social movement dynamics: (1) visual manifestations, as a class of expressions, produced in social movements; (2) the representation of social movements in images disseminated in mediation processes; and (3) a larger societal framework granting visibility to certain groups and claims while others remain invisible. Analyzing these aspects, visual methods have become increasingly popular as a field, attracting not only scholars but also students interested in social movements and public protest. A context of globalized societies, digital communication, and social media has inspired an increasing number of researchers to start including images in their research. This chapter will take the reader through each step of carrying out a research design based on an interdisciplinary toolbox of visual methods, to explore the research questions, the theoretical assumptions, the sampling, and data collection of images to be analyzed. Depending on the research topic you want to explore, it can make sense to select visual materials as part of a broader research project using either qualitative or quantitative methods. In discussing the limitations and possibilities of how one works with images in research, we draw on our own work and on examples based on work by colleagues, most of whom have focused on qualitative methods. After reflecting on the conceptual challenges and theoretical and empirical dilemmas of applying visual methods, we also show how we used visual analysis within discourse and frame analysis, participant observation, and interviews, and discuss quantitative components in our case studies. We also include reflections on the challenges of coding and of carrying out visual analysis in the area of social movement research.

Definitions and Dilemmas: Conceptualizing and Distinguishing Visual Analysis

What is an image, and how can we study images? These questions have inspired hot debate among visual theorists who come from different disciplines and

fields outside social movement studies. A first conceptual and methodological problem discussed among scholars is whether working with images has to be reduced to *visual* samples in the strict sense, or whether and how *visibility* more broadly defined could be an independent category to enrich our analyses of media discourse analysis, framing, ethnography, and other approaches used to study social movements. To fill this lacuna, we first provide an overview of the conceptualization of images and their inclusion within social movement research, distinguishing visual analysis from discourse and frame analysis. Then, after introducing sampling strategies and providing suggestions for data collection, we discuss a series of specific interdisciplinary methodological approaches.

In the debate about what constitutes an image, in comparison to a “text,” visual analysts who typically come from a background in art history and visual media analysis have recognized as legitimate objects of visual analysis images in the strict sense of what is considered visual, such as photographs, documents, posters, or other material visuals found in print, such as newspapers, and visual forms found online or in other non-print media or elsewhere, that present themselves to the scholar (Müller 2007). Other analysts, coming from the field of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis take a broader approach, proposing the inclusion of mentally constructed images that are expressed in different discursive forms, as well as the aforementioned stricter sense of visuals (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). In beginning to construct your research topic and the research questions you wish to answer, you should consider which of these conceptual definitions apply best to your research design.

A related, second, conceptual question that affects social movement scholars’ methodological choices regards how a *symbol* is distinguished from an *image*. Scholars have taken different roads to answer this question. For example, some cultural analysts would understand a word such as *socialism* as a symbol—a symbol that can come to stand for a social movement, and for different social movements in different places, a word that, as a symbol, may attract people’s attention in one place or at one time only to be contested within contentious media debates in another place or at another time (Schudson 1992). A third question of conceptualization among art historians and cultural theorists relates to whether or not a visual poster or a portrait can be regarded as an icon; for instance, should a portrait of Mao be treated as a religious icon, since it is worshipped by followers (Boehm 1994). Whatever conceptualizations you choose, we would suggest avoiding using both notions of *image* and *symbol* interchangeably. In this chapter, we use the term “image” to refer to pictures, photographs, and other visual material (including “images within texts,” which we describe later) that are part of the social movements we are researching, whereas, we use the term “symbol” when discussing the empirical question regarding ways distinct visual

images have (or may) become symbolic (often in powerful ways) in terms of the movements they represent. Note, however, that our definition here is yet more restricted than the broad understanding of images as media images in general (Gamson et al. 1992). Through consideration of these questions of conceptualization, you can develop a working definition of images that fits your research question and research design. As a next step, the following section introduces you to choices you have about your methods.

Research Design and Three Dimensions of Visual Methods

Depending on the research question(s) you want to ask, to plan your visual methods it is helpful to distinguish three broad dimensions of research that each open distinct methodological questions: first, the “visual expression” of social movements’ messages; second, the “visual representation of social movements by actors external to social movements”; and third, social movements’ visibility within societies more broadly defined (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013, xii). The first line of inquiry (visual expression) addresses those who want to explore *how* social movements communicate their messages visually and aesthetically by using images (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013, xii). The second line of inquiry helps those who want to understand *visual representations* or *representative images* of protestors in the media. In this way, visual analysis is effective in addressing questions about movement culture, strategy, and identity (e.g., on gender or intersectionality). In the next section, “Conceptual Differences: Visual Methods in Relation to Discourse Analysis and Framing”, we present visual iconography as one of the distinct interdisciplinary approaches that was developed to study the representation of social movements within media images. The third line of inquiry addresses research questions on movements’ *visibility* and *invisibility* in the broader societal context—an area of research for which scholars have used a combination of different approaches. If your research interest is focused on the (in)visibility of a movement, you should consider carefully that activists do not all have the same chances of being seen by audiences. For example, social movement scholars have used interviews and participant observation to explore issues of visibility as a dynamic process in which hegemonic images get challenged again and again (Currier 2012). In this way, they can better understand why and how protestors articulate their goals using images that fit a particular cultural and political context (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013, 1). Before you choose your method of visual analysis, it makes sense to consider which of the three dimensions of research interests you.

Conceptual Differences: Visual Methods in Relation to Discourse Analysis and Framing

Another challenge that relates to questions of conceptualization early in the research process is whether you will work with visual methods that include images that are text-based or focus only on images that are visual in the strict sense. When using visual analysis more broadly, how can we distinguish its application from well-known established text-based methods such as discourse analysis and framing, and how can we combine approaches from both fields in a meaningful way? In struggling with that question in our own empirical research, we engaged in an interdisciplinary exchange with art historians and media analysts who work with images to understand waves of global political contention. As discussed in the aforementioned debate about what defines an image, epistemological differences affect how scholars think about their choices regarding, and the differences between, visual and discursive (text-based) methods. On the one hand, art historians and media analysts specialized in visual analysis suggest that images require working with an iconographic methodology different from the methods of discourse analysis or framing we use for analyzing texts and verbal communication (Müller and Özcan 2007, 287). The point that the latter perspective makes is that images communicate by a logic of symbolic “association”, while texts communicate by a logic of rational argumentation (Müller and Özcan 2007, 288). On the other hand, some sociolinguist discourse analysts argue that images and texts “communicate” quite similarly; that is, that it is possible to teach ways discourse can be critically analyzed in terms of its visual aspects, and that every school child should acquire a critical “visual literature” that allows them to learn the “grammar” of visual images (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006). To further complicate this debate, still other discourse theorists who conceptualize political discourse as an exchange of rational arguments (or deliberation) assume that visual images do not follow a straightforward linear schema of argumentation as sociolinguistic “speech acts” do (Habermas 2001). This suggests that the methods used to explore discourse as theorized deliberation are insufficient to capture the visual and aesthetic channels through which change occurs (Doerr 2010).

This dilemma largely reflects how little social scientists know empirically about the role of images within political discourse. In order to deal with these theoretical and conceptual debates, it helped us to experiment with visual methods precisely as a way to find out more about the relationship and the overlap between images and texts through our own empirical work. In social movement research, Francesca Polletta’s work on discourse shows that some words function like images, for example, as in metaphor (Polletta 2006, 56). Polletta’s example, “She is a rose” illustrates how an image of a

rose metaphorically is associated with and comes to stand for a woman. Thus, Polletta's work on stories and symbolic associations emphasizes that symbols (images in the broadest sense) are deeply ambiguous, or, to use a fancy term, *polyvalent*; that is, open to multiple interpretations (Mitchell 1994). These examples should make the visual analyst sensitive to considering the very fine-grained use of images within discourse and within verbal interactions of storytelling in movements. Without us noticing, our interview data may be filled with highly relevant symbolic notions and images that expose the structure of the thinking and the strategies of the activist groups we are studying. Practically speaking, the disagreement about what, exactly, images are and how we can understand and study them opens different pathways of analysis, depending on the research questions that we want to explore. We will get back to this problem in our empirical examples on how to use visual methods in the next section, "Finding Materials, Data Selection, and Sampling".

Another field of social movement scholars attuned with visual analysis is the domain of framing theorists. Sociologists have begun to investigate the multifaceted visual aspects of framing, which succeed or fail to mobilize emotions such as shame and anger (Halfmann and Young 2010) or joy and pride (Mattoni 2008) through displays of embodied rituals of interaction or distant media communications. Pictures, portraits, photographs, and videos of protest, like media texts, are a key strategy used by protestors to communicate with different audiences, sometimes with ambivalent consequences given the complex and contentious reception of culturally coded visual frames in pluralist publics (Gamson et al. 1992). For example, Eeva Luhtakallio's work provides an innovative way to study the framing of gender and group styles focusing on visual materials (Luhtakallio 2013). Luhtakallio applies Goffman's concept of *visual keying* to study the reproduction and change of (dominant) gender framings created by activists themselves in their own protest events—in the visual performance, the dress code, the photographs taken, and the verbal documentation of these events. In combining visual and (discursive) frame analysis, Luhtakallio is able to document a tension between physical participation in protest events and the visual representation of gendered role divisions presented in the event materials.

While this example shows how theories and methods of framing offer a useful theoretical starting point, inspiring empirical analyses that includes visual materials, it also reveals limits. A problem that researchers using frame analysis struggle with regards the cognitive and emotional resonance of older iconographic traditions and popular images in visual framing. Unlike media analysis of text documents, the analysis of images used by activists requires a deeper reflection on the meaning of distinct visuals used for specific local protest events. In other words, where do "visual" frames come from (historically speaking) when they are being used by protestors in marches? If your aim is to include visual materials in a frame analysis, this question about the

larger iconographic *context* demands you to go beyond your own interpretation of the distinct images used in protest action, and embark on a historical empirical analysis, given the open-ended, symbolic character of association that causes images to be “read” in contrasting ways depending on the cultural context and background of the viewer (Müller and Özcan 2007). Visual materials, in other words, challenge the conception of framing as diagnostic, prognostic, and action-oriented, and the study of political discourse as primarily defined in discursive terms (Polletta 2006).

An example based on Noa Milman’s work can briefly illustrate both challenges and advantages of including images within media discourse and frame analysis. Noa’s dissertation research compared the media images of single mothers’ movements against austerity and welfare reforms in Israel and in the United States (Milman 2013). After completing the first part of her analysis, which was restricted to strategies of *framing* within news media *texts*, Noa also included visual images such as hundreds of photographs of women participating in the protest actions, working with a dataset of 462 articles from Israel and the state of Massachusetts in the United States. By including photographs for each of the case studies, Noa could answer an unresolved question that appeared in her text-based comparison of different data sources. Moreover, while activists and sympathizers in both of her cases heavily criticized journalists’ racialized and sexist reporting style, Noa’s frame analysis shows that journalists in Israel and in progressive American newspapers, formally at least, conformed with the neutrality and balance norm, presenting the government’s frame as well as the movements’ counter-frame (Milman 2013).

The analysis of visual images showed, first, for the American case, that the photographs of single mothers illustrating newspaper articles clearly *undermined* the balanced reporting style by presenting pictures of angry black and Latina women. Interestingly, protestors were pictured as *separated* from their children by photographs that constructed disgust among viewers by showing frightening feminists yelling at the camera (cf. Halfmann and Young 2010). Protestors’ children were pictured in overcrowded social housing projects symbolizing poverty and neglect, confirming the impression of promiscuous mothers overwhelmed by their task of bringing up five and more children with running noses and fearful faces (Milman 2013). These images tapped into familiar stereotypes of minority women and constructed a negative image of protestors as irresponsible mothers, discrediting them and undermining activists’ claims making, as well as their self-presentation as rational actors (Polletta 2006).

In contrast, in Israel, protestors were almost exclusively photographed in close body contact or in proximity to their children, showing activists performing as caregivers of handicapped children, heroic mothers evoking culturally familiar sentiments of caring solidarity and love. At the same time,

photographs did not reduce activists to their role as mothers. Most importantly, a charismatic movement leader figured prominently on title pages, pictured on her long protest march to Jerusalem without her children, yet carrying a large flag and wearing a shirt with the slogan “a mother’s outcry.” This image contained two complementary messages: first, it constructed the leader as a citizen who is both an active protestor and a mother, and second, it situated her maternity as well as her protest in a positive arena of a patriotic-nationalist field in which women take part in citizenship. Noa’s example shows how scholars who work on media framing and discourse analysis can refine their findings by including photographs and visual illustrations in their analysis. Be aware, however, of the limitation of traditional newspaper archives such as Lexis Nexis, which do not provide researchers with photographs and illustrations.

In sum, while there is certainly some overlap with methods of discourse analysis and framing, the study of images, whether visual in the strict sense or more broadly (including visual images in texts, for example), poses challenges to either approach, highlighting the promise of the new field of visual analysis for social movement studies. As an example, many students of social movements use PowerPoint as a method of visual presentation—do we realize how PowerPoint structures our way of thinking about movements (della Porta 2013)? Indeed, the multiplicity of visual and aesthetic forms in daily life and social media environments creates multiple dilemmas for analysts. In order to start answering some of these open theoretical and conceptual questions, the following sections provide more general considerations and practical examples on the specific dilemmas of case selection and data collection based on our own empirical work.

Finding Materials, Data Selection, and Sampling

As with other kinds of research designs, the choice of cases and strategies of data collection within a visual analysis approach depend on the research question you have in mind. Social movement scholars have embedded visual methods within single or comparative case studies, quantitative and qualitative research-based designs.

Once you know your topic and start the selection of visual data, a first pitfall to be avoided is oversampling the dependent variable. Perhaps your inspiration for working with visual materials stems from your interest (whether based on a negative or positive reaction) in a single powerful media image that is being spread by activists or used as a representation of protest across

countries. For example, many theorists have become interested in visual analysis following 9/11 as a global, real-time image effect. However, while many analysts have come to accept and refer to the “power of image” following 9/11, few have been doing systematic empirical analysis of the actors or contextual or historical factors in relation to global event images. From that perspective, we would suggest taking a step back. Before you start embarking on visual data analysis, it is important to take a sheet of paper to write down the following questions: What different types of images surround the one that inspired you specifically? How can the different image categories that you want to focus on be studied in interaction, for example, photographs, paintings, flyers, videos, or online or other non-print images (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013)? Who created each image and which brokers have been engaged in the process of diffusion? Which audiences are addressed by each image, and how do they decode and react to the image? In other words, rather than focusing solely on the categories of images that best fit the hypothesis you have in mind, your cases may provide other categories of images that are relevant to your research.

Once you have determined your research question(s), your cases, and your materials, another step in the research process is the sampling of data. Again, before you start, it will be useful to first take a step back, and ask yourself what are the different categories of images that matter for the research question you want to ask. For example, if you were interested in studying the Occupy Movement, and you wanted to analyze the diffusion and relevance of distinct images of events from the Spanish Indignados to the American Occupy mobilization (Castaneda 2012), you would have many choices. Perhaps, you would like to focus your analysis on pictures of Occupy protestors in the news in particular national contexts, or, you could be interested in the pathways of diffusion, or the multiple interpretations that globally diffused symbols, such as the tent, took in a distinct localized mobilization. Or, you could focus on the broader discursive representation of protestors within the news—including texts and images. Likewise, you could focus on the diffusion of symbolic terms such as “OWS,” or “99 percents,” which, once coined, acquired different meanings in social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. All of these examples can be counted as images, but you will need different visual methods to study each. Thus, in terms of data selection, our practical suggestion is to start theoretically, selecting categories of images relevant to your case(s) based on a broad view of data comprised of multiple categories of images that include visual materials as well as discursive representations such as symbols and other discourse materials.

It is useful at this stage in the research process to prepare a checklist, asking yourself the following questions: Which images, metaphors, pictures or symbols would be useful to address your specific research question(s)? Which other ones could be neglected? Should visual analysis be at the center

of your analysis, or could it be combined (triangulated) with different methods? Depending on how you answer these questions, different methods and/or an interdisciplinary mix of different methodological approaches could be useful. However, in each of these designs, visual methods pose varying challenges. In the following, these general considerations and dilemmas of case selection and data collection are explored and spelled out in detail with examples based on our own empirical work.

Analyzing Data: Three Steps of Visual Analysis and Contextualization

Once you have acquired your data and selected your sample, the analysis can begin. Here, the first important note to consider is that we cannot understand an image independent of its context, and we ourselves as viewers are part of the social context in which an image exists as well. A method we can use to start analyzing images in their historical context of creation and diffusion is visual iconography. Inspired by the work of early and mid-twentieth-century art historians Aby Warburg and Erwin Panofsky, “political iconography” is a “comparative method, aimed at disclosing the meaning of visuals in a specific context at a specific time” (Müller and Özcan 2007, 287). Further developed in the nineties by art historian Martin Warnke and his students (Müller and Özcan 2007), political iconography has become an interdisciplinary research approach that connects social science research questions with methods of art history. Iconological interpretation requires three steps: first, iconographic description; second, content analysis; and, third, a contextualized interpretation of the visual (Müller and Özcan 2007, 288). Importantly, this self-reflexive method assumes that the image being analyzed structures the context of the analysis itself (Müller and Özcan 2007, 287). In other words, our own social and cultural position as researchers is never neutral: it is shaping and constraining our capacity for doing analysis. For example, if we use iconological interpretation to explain why a particular poster produced by an activist group was diffused so widely across different countries, we may implicitly impose our own experience of the image on our attempts at neutral, scientific analysis. This challenge of interpretation is a problem for all visual methods, qualitative as well as quantitative ones. To use political iconography for analysis in the field of social movements we recommend researchers put particular emphasis on all three steps described here. Moreover, the third step of contextualization can help to complement your own interpretation of visual materials through the addition of interviews and other triangulation research strategies.

Applying a visual method approach to your research design presents the challenge of assuring your data interpretation is valid and your data presentation is understandable for your reader. Just as triangulation can help validate your own image interpretations, it can be an important component throughout your research process. Given the multiple interpretations scholars can attribute to the meaning of images, you should consider triangulation of collected data as well as source material. In this way, your findings can be more convincing to an academic audience. For example, one strategy that could be used to triangulate the interpretation of an image produced by an activist group would be to interview or survey not only the activists who created the image and their supporters, but also members of other groups. In all aspects of your research, look for additional sources. This triangulation strategy will help you to refine your hypothesis and uncover different meanings associated with the images, as well as the relevance these means have for various audiences (Gamson et al. 1992).

Visual Analysis in Practice: An Example

To provide an example of working with visual methods, in this section we briefly discuss one of Nicole Doerr's case studies. As with other researchers studying the use of online media in social movements, Nicole had been developing interest in working with visual methods. While examining the relevance of online public forums by emerging *transnational* social movements addressing European politics, she was presented with an empirical puzzle that led her to base her research design on visual methods, complementing the traditional discursive approaches she commonly uses. She was inspired to conduct this explorative research due to the emergence of an unusual young generation of protestors who, though they lacked financial and organizational resources, were successfully establishing a transnational social movement network that relied heavily on visual content to impact European politics, spawning, specifically, the EuroMayDay parades to challenge the issue of *social precarity* (Mattoni 2012).¹ In related research, Alice Mattoni and Nicole Doerr have traced alternative media strategies as well as the considerable structural and linguistic constraints on the ability of the EuroMayday network to spread to Italy and Central and Northern Europe (Doerr and Mattoni 2014). Here, Nicole discusses how her use of visual iconography and visual content analysis, in combination with other qualitative methods, helped her to understand the cultural context and the political meaning of EuroMayday images and texts produced by local groups of activists in Germany and Italy between 2005 and 2009. In 2005, on the traditional occasion of Labor Day (May 1), hundreds of thousands of citizens and

migrants across Europe participated in non-traditional street parade performances and other direct actions within a transnational network of local protests “against precarity and for a free, open and radical Europe,” including street parades from Milan to Maribor, from Athens to Helsinki (Doerr and Mattoni 2014). The organizers of EuroMayday protests were people in their twenties and thirties. Initially, EuroMayDay was launched as a transnational network by left libertarian Italian protestors, who used their contacts in other countries to mobilize the issue of *social precarity* to create a European radical left protest network (Mattoni 2008). The EuroMayDay activist organizers, most of whom were in precarious job situations, belonged to a generation of students and young people that had previously been portrayed as politically disinterested (della Porta and Caiani 2009).

There were two primary reasons EuroMayDay attracted Nicole’s attention to visual methods of social movement analysis. First, young protestors across Europe framed the traditional May Day as a “European” protest event by posting hundreds of images and maps and texts online on their shared EuroMayDay webpage. As a participant observer, Nicole was able to analyze discourse and deliberation that took place in transnational planning meetings. While EuroMayDay organizers clearly disagreed on whether or not “Europe,” or the European Union (EU), was their shared political *frame*, it was surprising to note that activists produced visual representations of Europe, using even the official Euro logo (Doerr 2010). Second, while her research interest at the time was focused on communication challenges facing citizens in multilingual public spheres addressing EU politics, EuroMayday presented a particularly interesting case due to its use of visual methods, as the relatively young generation of EuroMayDay activists were among the first groups intentionally visualizing the EU in their decidedly alternative, and visually styled social media (Doerr and Mattoni 2014). By creating alternative, visually styled social media that was shared across the Internet (Mattoni 2008), the locally rooted EuroMayday protestors, though small, resource-poor groups, could act as grassroots “imagineers” of European integration and mobilize a wider public to transnational participation on the issue of migration (Monforte 2010).

Questions of Research Design and Typical Challenges in the Social Movements Field

Some of the typical pitfalls of conducting visual methods-based research in social movement analysis are well reflected in Nicole’s case study of EuroMayday. In terms of sampling visual materials, the EuroMayday case

exemplifies the difficulties facing researchers who are attempting to construct a visual sample that captures and represents the “visual repertoire” of a social movement network that is just forming, widely fragmented, decentralized, and spread across multiple countries and groups—conditions, notably, typical of recent successful social movement networks and waves of global protest. First, like many emerging social movements, the EuroMayday network used visual images displayed online and in other, new, forms of social media, an archival challenge facing all researchers whose visual data is not print-based. Second, activists’ self-produced visuals, including fashion, video, and stickers, were so numerous and so widely dispersed across hundreds of webpages, that it was virtually impossible to document all visual materials created by activists in different countries. Researchers should reflect upon this challenge in their research design and data presentation, considering that findings based on visual methods that involve social media and Internet sources can often be, at best, a starting point for a qualitative methodology, in particular in cases that attempt to interpret the visual language of protest produced by large, dispersed, and decentralized social movement networks that connect people across multiple countries and groups.

SAMPLING AND CODING VISUAL DATA

Another challenge posed by the new media formats is analyzing social movements’ public self-presentation. Since the EuroMayday network communicated through alternative social media and webpages shared transnationally, Nicole encountered the difficult task of collecting and archiving the online visual materials that the movement used in attempting to project their self-image. This was a particular challenge, since she was considering hundreds of activists’ images on EuroMayday webpages and blogs that had been accessed by tens of thousands of protestors.

Additionally, researchers studying current protest networks face the challenge of selecting their sample among an even greater number of images spread decentrally by sympathizers and core activists through commercial social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, used subsequently, providing new attractive options for obtaining relevant images for research. These newer, politically relevant forms of social media are useful tools for researchers, particularly those who want to understand how images or videos become viral (such as the *Kony 2012* video,² one of the most popular discussion topics in our classrooms). However, they also present a dilemma, because mainstream search engines, such as Google, and web-based social forums, such as Facebook, present ever-changing user policy and privacy rules as well as individualistic network designs, impeding profound media research, in

particular due to the inherent selection bias, paralleling similar difficulty in analyzing newspaper images (Müller and Özcan 2007).

Another data-sampling challenge Nicole faced in her research stemmed from the limited access to source information that was typical of the online sites and the groups involved in founding the EuroMayday network (Doerr and Mattoni 2014). It was not clear, for example, which group created what image. Studying activists' visuals on changing webpages, often created and used temporarily by local EuroMayday groups, for example, made it difficult to trace the creation and use of the online images. In order to tackle this type of challenge, documentation is extremely important, as well as triangulation strategies, which allow researchers to combine their visual analysis, and other methods of discourse analysis, with participant observation notes and group member interviews and surveys, all of which were possible in the cases Nicole studied. In terms of coding the sample of visuals, it would be prudent for visual analysts to assume that the same image used by different activist groups in different countries, even if dif-fused over the same webpage or social media, would *not* necessarily represent the same political meaning. In other words, visual (content) analysis, in a perhaps even more demanding way than the analysis of written dis-course, requires the researcher to consider the ambiguity and polyvalence of language within different place-specific cultural and political contexts (Müller and Özcan 2007). Given the contextual concerns that impact visual analysis, it is thus necessary to complement visual methods and data with text-based methods and other materials, such as interviews, as will be shown in the example given in the section headed "Applying the Three Steps of Visual Analysis to My Research."

In the field of social movements, much of the research has been conducted on cases that are relatively recent when compared to other fields. At the time of Nicole's research of EuroMayday, this implied a lack of a scholarly literature on the meaning of visual images in social movements (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013). Therefore, her research design was mostly explorative. Nicole's research question was broadly inductive in the sense that she wanted to understand the relevance and use of visual images by activist groups such as EuroMayday, who were among the first groups to have successfully used alternative social media to communicate across linguistic and national borders. For example, one point worth recognizing about EuroMayday protestors was that the visual styled communication platforms they used on the Internet differed from the more nationally rooted and text-based public forums used by social movements such as the European Social Forum (ESF) (della Porta 2005). The research she undertook in an attempt to add new insights on citizen participation in understanding the Europeanization of social movements complemented a huge body of work that was based mainly on the analysis of

text-based materials and media arenas (della Porta and Caiani 2009). This theoretical approach allowed her to analyze the EuroMayday protests as a potential emerging “transnational public space” within social movements (della Porta 2005).

Since she was interested in EuroMayday as a transnational public space, Nicole operationalized her research design so that she could explore the question of to what extent distinct visual images were shared and debated in European and local meetings and/or virtual interactions by protestors. Visual analysts who find their images on webpages should be careful to acknowledge multiple boundaries of access and usage of Internet media for some of the participants and target groups of the social movement that they study. Given the explorative research design and the novelty of her case, she followed a mostly inductive research strategy to explore what unexpected findings the data would reveal. At the same time, given her theoretical interest in the relevance and meaning of how European politics and the EU were displayed in EuroMayday visuals, she was interested in finding differences and similarities in the images created in local protests in *different* countries. The first step of the analysis was to explore how the discourse regarding Europe and the collective identification of the protest network would figure within the texts that different local groups used. Second, she explored the visual content and meaning of EuroMayday images in her data sample using iconographic methods. Third, she compared and contrasted different sets of meanings found in different visual and/or discursive media and in the different national contexts in which her cases were embedded. Fourth, she conducted, in total, 30 interviews with EuroMayday designers and participants, and explored the content of face-to-face discussion to identify the meanings that distinct images took on for the local group members themselves. Nicole interviewed EuroMayday activists who were the creators of visuals and texts on their webpages on the intended meaning of the images they created. Her questions were designed to address her expectation that activists were motivated by an ideational logic of counter-hegemonic strategies aimed at giving visibility to specific groups (Chesters and Welsh 2004). And finally, she was a participant observer in two European and six local small-group meetings, and she attended three mass parades of the EuroMayday network in Germany and Italy in the years 2005 to 2009.

HOW VISUAL METHODS HELPED TO SOLVE AN EMPIRICAL PUZZLE

What led Nicole to experimenting with visual methods was an empirical puzzle that arose during her research that she was unable to address through

discourse analysis and participant observation. As a participant observer in transnational meetings, she found that EuroMayday groups continuously re-framed shared texts on webpages, and that EuroMayday groups, after years of debate, had not reached agreement on the usage of the concept of “Europe” in their local campaigns (Doerr 2010). One thing EuroMayday organizers seemed to agree upon, however, was a shared political image of migrants that had been created and diffused by EuroMayday groups across Europe within their posters, parades, and webpages. The one dominant shared theme linking different local groups in Italy, Spain, Germany, and other countries involved the images of migrants, in which they presented their own alternative, transnationalist “citizen-hero” as a precarious migrant (Doerr 2010). Given that activists did not reach agreement regarding having or presenting a shared European political identity, how was it that they seemed to have a shared image—is, migrants, so central in many of the posters they shared online across Europe? Visual analysis proved itself to be a useful tool in exploring this question. The following examples from our data analysis provide insights into the challenges and limitations of visual analysis, as well as ways to combine different steps of visual analysis with other qualitative methodologies, such as interviewing, text-based (discourse) analysis, and participant observation.

Applying the Three Steps of Visual Analysis to Research

As suggested by Marion Müller and Ezra Özcan, Nicole worked with the three steps of visual analysis to study the images produced by activists in different countries on their webpages and online campaigns used in the EuroMayday protest network. As a first step, she worked with visual *content* analysis; second, she did a deeper *iconographic* analysis of distinct symbols within posters that she found on EuroMayday webpages; and third, she combined these first two steps with a contextual analysis that included qualitative methods, such as discourse analysis, interviews, and participant observation. As will be shown, the triangulation of methods, which included both visual and text-based approaches, helped her to balance the limits of visual analysis (discussed earlier). Notably, to counter the problem of subjective interpretation on the part of the researcher and increase the reliability of the findings, she triangulated the data and included text-based methods, including conducting interviews and discourse analysis of documents created by activists and discussions during the meetings she attended.

Visual Analysis Step 1: Visual Content Analysis

To explore the complex aesthetic messages that selected images created by EuroMayday groups acquired when disseminated in a multicultural, transnational public space of network members, Nicole first applied visual iconography as a method of visual content analysis (Müller and Özcan 2007). Specifically, she conducted a visual content analysis of protestors' alternative images of migration, a good example of which is a poster designed by EuroMayday Milan that shows two young figures in front of an urban skyline (Figure 17.1).

Before we describe the content analysis of the poster, it should be noted that posters displayed on the websites of local Mayday groups in Italy, Germany, and other countries, such as the example given here, are widely different in style and content, and that all were created and distributed by the protestors themselves. While visual images created by local groups in different local settings tend to reflect a plurality of different place-specific subjectivities



Figure 17.1 Milan EuroMayday Poster 2008

Source: Poster designed by Zoe Romano.

involved in struggles concerning groups such as artists, young precarious employees, workers, students, and/or single mothers, a shared theme of EuroMayday posters is their interpretation of migration (Mattoni and Doerr 2007). All EuroMayday posters found online visualize migration as an activity of everyday life within Europe's global cities and their peripheries. This contrasts with the passive state of victimhood provided in mainstream media reports of trafficking or undocumented immigration (Falk 2010).

The poster, visualizing two young figures in front of an urban skyline, was designed and put online by EuroMayday Milan in 2008. Looking at this sample poster, we can use this checklist to examine the visual content of the image. A variety of elements can be described in addressing these questions, such as the flashy and figurative elements of style and colors (e.g., pink) used. Second, the couple standing in the center take a dynamic posture. The male figure is presented in a seemingly resistant posture, with his arms crossed, while at the same time smiling. The female figure, though, is just a little bit darker in hue, a subtle difference that we will discuss later, as it was important to the creators of the image. Third, elements of text are combined with visual designs, with an English-language slogan addressing the European dimension of protest (*Let's conspire and fight for the Other Europe*), as well as an Italian subheading addressing precarious workers as well as migrant workers participating in the protest parade in Milan. Listed in the subtle green hue at the left margin of the poster are all of the European protest cities involved in the EuroMayday network, while the red dot on the right side marks the place and time of the local protest in Milan. In relation to how the couple is visually portrayed, the Italian text mentions migrants first and precarious [workers] second, emphasizing the political relevance of migrants within this protest event. Fourth, regarding the question of what is represented and what is hidden in this poster, notice, in the comparison of text and visual elements that the visual layer does not highlight Europe as a topic, though it is mentioned *three* times within the text. Summing up this example of the first step of visual analysis, *visual content analysis*, the following checklist can provide researchers with a starting point to orient their research.

Visual Analysis Step 1: Visual Content Analysis Checklist

- What is displayed in the image? What is in the center? Background? Margins?
- Who is displayed in the image? When? Where?
- What colors and styles are used?
- Which elements are visual and which are textual in the design? Are they bold or subdued?
- How do the textual and visual elements compare to each other? Which are hidden or invisible?

Visual Analysis Step 2: Iconographic Interpretation

In the second step of visual analysis (iconographic interpretation), we deepen our analysis by focusing on specific motives within the EuroMayday poster (Figure 17.1). What “iconography” means, in this second step, is that we undertook a contextualized interpretation (Rose 2007) of the genres of the images, placing them within a wider historic context of image traditions, forms, and aesthetic backgrounds. Nicole also analyzed activists’ text documents on the Internet and in calls for action of the main website of the EuroMayday network, comparing them to selected official campaign texts distributed by the European Commission on its EU website (Doerr 2010). Departing from images displayed on EuroMayday webpages and blogs, she explored the production (encoding) of distinct images, as well as their re-interpretation (decoding) in place-specific settings using interviews (Doerr 2010).

To provide an example of iconographic analysis, we will briefly describe how we can explore the color composition and spatial organization of the EuroMayday poster, as well as the use of media technologies the Milan group used for its creation and distribution. In a first step of Nicole’s iconographic analysis, Nicole compared the skyline displayed in the poster with historic images of the urban skyline, which is in fact a very distinct interpretation of Milan. Second, she undertook an iconographic comparison of the Milan poster with other posters on webpages shared with German and French EuroMayday groups. Posters that were shared with these other groups had similar skyline elements illustrating, however, the well-known shapes of the skylines of Paris and Berlin (Doerr 2010).

Through the connection of these posters shared and accessible to participants across a single connected webpage, the “Other Europe” that the text of this poster mentions, becomes visible. Third, the iconographic perspective also helps us understand the different colors produced in the poster, symbolizing different ideological groups in the local Milan coalition of protestors. For example, take the use of the color pink. We first assumed that the color pink could represent a symbol, similar to ways in which scholars have portrayed the meaning of this color in the context of global justice protests across the world and their “carnavalesque forms of protest” (Chesters and Welsh 2004, 328). However, the use of pink may correspond to the transnational character of the public space within EuroMayday, or it could be seen as a political symbol to replace the well-known colors of the EU; that is, the colors of blue and yellow used in the EU flag (Risse 2011). Interestingly, based on additional interviews, we learned that none of these meanings had inspired the local Mayday designer from Milan to use the color pink in the poster in Figure 17.1.

Moreover, we suggest that researchers should, with any case study, try to include interviews as part of their iconographic analysis. In this example,

it would also be important for the analyst to explore ways the color pink is associated with different meanings that go beyond the field of social movement studies focused on global justice groups at the time studied. Indeed, Nicole's interviews with the local designers of the poster showed that pink has a place-specific political meaning that was neither necessarily related to the EU nor shared by other EuroMayday groups in other countries. Local Milan-based EuroMayday founders said that pink stands for queerness as a new radical subjectivity beyond traditional left workers' mobilizations in the distinct context of Milan (Doerr 2010; see also Mattoni 2012). This distinct conception, however, was only familiar to, and hence understood by, a particular element among the participants, mostly in Italy. While these brief examples can only be tentative beginnings of a full iconographic interpretation, the following checklist provides more suggestions on how to carry out a visual iconography that fits your cases and research design.

Summing up this example of the second step of visual analysis, *iconographic interpretation*, the following checklist helps researchers to consider the place-specific and fragmented meaning that an image acquires among different groups of producers, transmitters, and recipients. Note that this checklist is far from complete, and it may serve as a unique starting point on how to carry out the second step of iconographic interpretation.

Checklist Second Step of Visual Analysis: Iconographic Interpretation

- How do images designed by activists quote older, familiar cultural symbols, and how is the mainstream (e.g., official) meaning of symbols questioned through the alternative image created by the activist group?
- Beyond familiar social and political meanings, what meaning does the visual hold for activists and/or designers themselves?
- Reception and decoding: how do sympathizers and/or opponents of the movement interpret, challenge, and receive the image produced by the activist group?
- If possible, explore how a visual has been changed, copied, and altered by transmitters and recipients in the diffusion process?

EVALUATING ICONOGRAPHIC DATA, AND LIMITATIONS OF EITHER TEXT-BASED OR VISUAL-ONLY METHODS

In conclusion, based on the example from the poster, we suggest that a dilemma of iconographic interpretation that researchers may want to avoid is short conclusions based on visual materials only. Let us illustrate this dilemma by yet another example. The EuroMayday poster uses a reference to Europe in its text content, yet does not explicitly refer to symbols of Europe in its visual content.

Either a visual or a discursive analysis of the poster would thus miss parts of social reality that is of relevance for the research question interested in images of Europe—in relation to EuroMayday’s protest and its focus on migration. In methodological terms, a visual content analysis and iconography, if possible, should include a thorough analysis of interviews and text-based methods. This leads us to the third and final step of contextualization, which complements visual data analysis with other methods and forms of data as well.

Visual Analysis Step 3: Contextualizing Images

In the third step of visual analysis, the task is to contextualize images in their broader social and political context of 1) emergence; 2) diffusion; and 3) reception (Müller and Özcan 2007; Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013). We restrict our examples here to focus foremost on the first part of a context of emergence. In order to understand the political and cultural messages of EuroMayday images as created in their social context of emergence, in the following we draw on the aforementioned data gathered through participant observation and interviews. In combination, these methods help us to contextualize and verify the relevance of the first set of impressions gained through the iconography and content analysis of visuals displayed online on activist webpages. The following questions helped us to guide the third and perhaps most important step of visual analysis; that is, the contextualization of the images (see the checklist). We contextualized the images that we interpreted by comparing them with data from participant observations and by conducting further interviews.

Checklist Third Step Visual Analysis: Contextualizing Images

- How did local groups discuss visual posters and representations in their face-to-face group discussions?
- How did different group members and/or the designer(s) think about the image? Were there conflicts?
- Which group members felt represented in the image? Which felt excluded? Which specific elements of an image were controversial?
- Which new ideas (and old frames or concepts) are being made visible according to a) designers; b) sympathizers/opponents?

Contextualizing Visual Data through Interviews and Limitations

For the third step of analysis, we rely on more interviews with the local group members and designers of the Mayday poster in Milan in order to

contextualize the images we had analyzed. Unexpectedly, this contextualization method helped us find out an interesting point about the relationship between image and discourse in the transnational public space created within EuroMayday: the visual production process to produce the poster in Fig. 17.1 was both local and transnational, based on the entrance of migrants as new members that provoked internal discussion in one local group and gave birth to a new image of both the local and the transnational group. The local MayDay group in Milan initially imagined itself as a group working first and foremost on *precarity*. The entrance of new members, the groups' pluralist composition, and its discussions about restrictive immigration laws by the Italian government, inspired a new "we-group" imaginary, symbolizing a joint struggle of labor migrants and other Italian activists previously part of EuroMayday Milan.

One of the EuroMayday founders from Milan, herself a professional graphic designer, explains why she put together the poster after intense discussion within her group:

I made this poster based on a photograph we took [in Milan]. The female figure is a migrant; the male figure is a precarious [worker]. This poster stresses migration as a topic, and the struggles for migrants in our own network, as also written in the text. At the beginning, EuroMayday was very much a network on precarity. In 2008 for the first time, migrants participated actively in the process of constructing the EuroMayday parade [in Milan] so we felt *they* should be protagonists with us on the poster. Then *we* talked about the Bossi/Fini legislation against migrants, and new racism. What is politically very important is that the poster shows second generation migrants, who are part of our network. . . . This poster does not show our foes, it shows *us*, *our group*.³ [our emphasis]

In the above e-mail interview, this designer of the MayDay poster in Milan 2008 makes a very interesting point, which helps us to understand the intersections of visual and verbal symbols in transnational publics created within social movements. She argues that the verbal, discursive process that inspired her group to produce the poster was both local and transnational, based on the entrance of new members that provoked internal deliberation and gave birth to a new image of the group. The local Mayday group in Milan imagined itself a diverse group as both migrants and left libertarian Italians. The interview itself constructs a symbolic "we" group in reflecting on that process. First, the interviewee explains that the dialogue and participation of migrants entering the *local* group in Milan led to a change in the visual self-presentation of the Milan EuroMayday network that produced the poster (Figure 17.1). The groups' pluralist composition, and its discussions about restrictive immigration laws by the Italian government, inspired a new "we-group" imaginary in the words of the interviewee herself, as her group symbolizes a joint struggle of labor migrants and other activists previously part of EuroMayday Milan.

Indeed, it was only due to the additional interviews conducted in the third step of analysis that Nicole became aware of a limitation of her visual interpretation of the EuroMayday poster. Moreover, findings based on interviews showed that an official press event preceded the production of the poster—a press event, however, that is no longer part of the visual that we see in Figure 17.1. This shows the aforementioned problem of lacking archives for rapidly changing online data. Indeed, the poster was inspired by an official EU event with its own visual symbolic. Because activists in Milan disagreed with the symbolism of the official EU event, they created their own poster through a *transnational* visual sharing of images with other EuroMayday protestors. Mayday organizers, among them the interviewee from Milan, had planned a Europe-wide demonstration in the German city of Aachen. EuroMayday chose Aachen as the place for their demonstration with the aim of appropriating an official EU event: the Charlemagne Prize reception with a meeting between Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy. The event celebrated German Chancellor Merkel’s work in support of European integration at a time when Merkel, like French President Sarkozy, was pushing for restrictive immigration policies. The Mayday designers were upset about the celebration of Merkel’s achievement for European integration in this context. Interestingly, then, the interviewee said that her own group in Milan had not agreed on using the same poster as their peer group in Aachen, but created their own poster (as shown in Figure 17.1):

In 2008 [EuroMayday] Aachen activists announce[d] that Sarkozy would [hand] Merkel the Charlemagne Prize on the first of May [. . .] We [in Milan] discussed and then decided to call for [a European-wide] participation to go to Aachen to complain about the prize and the idea of Europe symbolized by that prize. A white and Catholic Europe. That’s how the Aachen [EuroMayday] poster with Merkel and Sarkozy was produced. In Milan, EuroMayday posters usually have the people participating in protests as protagonists of the iconography, that’s why we decided to make another poster in keeping with the same graphical mood.⁴

Importantly, this interview shows that disagreement about official and place-specific visual codes triggered the creation of other images in new places, and thus a dialogue in visual as well as verbal terms. EuroMayday activists in Milan created their own local poster based on several steps of re-interpretation of official images of European citizen heroes symbolized in the figures of official politicians.

In sum, it is important to note that only the tools of visual analysis allowed Nicole to show that transnational sharing among activists, involving visual as well as verbal codes, changed official symbols of citizens featuring EU leaders by means of placing them in a local context showing precarious youth and migrants in Italy and Milan as everyday heroes struggling with precarity in the European Union. The visual grammar of a single official EU event,

and the shared critique of restrictive immigration policies, inspired the Milan group to imagine itself as a protagonist of transnationalist citizenship in the enlarged Europe.

COMPLEMENTING THE FINDINGS WITH MORE EVIDENCE FROM PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

It is necessary and possible to go beyond interviews with activists and use of participant observation in order to further refine these impressions gained through visual and discursive evidence. Moreover, by comparing images created in different local EuroMayday groups in Germany and Italy, and through participant observation, Nicole found out that the converging symbol of migrants did *not* mean the same for different local groups. Interestingly, her participant observation and analysis of debates during the transnational EuroMayday meetings made her realize important political differences and the persistence of distinct local visual posters used in single EuroMayday groups (Doerr 2010). For example, German and European activists in joint European meetings observed had a heated discussion over whether to use a “European” reference frame in their joint campaign. During these debates, EuroMayday activists from single local groups in Germany, in contrast to their Italian counterparts, saw themselves in clear opposition to the perceived “empathetic” and imaginary work on European politics by Milanese Mayday activists. Following discussion with Berliners and other groups, the Italian founders of the Mayday network in Milan changed their visual representation of their own group, as they wanted it to be represented in the poster that has been discussed.

Summing up this brief discussion on the usefulness of visual methods, these findings suggest that a *contextualized* visual analysis should account for intertextual, interrelated meanings created through visual as well as textual communication processes and face-to-face interaction that connect transnational social movement networks using multiple channels of social media and communication. Together, the examples from Nicole’s triangulation of visual content analysis, analysis of EuroMayday texts iconography, and findings from interviews and participant observation confirm the impression that Europe was not a consensual, political theme of the Mayday protests. Only the tools of visual analysis allowed Nicole to show that, despite their continuing disagreements and differences in the political texts and discourses produced, EuroMayday groups in different countries shared a visual theme in posters and stickers that refer to migration, and to migrants as potential protagonists of a future citizenship and positive solidarity beyond the nation state.

Combining Visual Analysis with Participant Observation, and Audiovisual Analysis

In the example discussed, we examine participant observation as an additional method to verify the relevance of our visual method. In addition, it can be helpful to use audiovisual analysis as a method independent from Internet sources and the analysis of images created by activists. Nicole has experienced the usefulness of audiovisual analysis during her research of South African social movements, doing participant observation with a video camera (Doerr 2008). Participant observation and ethnographic approaches related to the use of images come with some limits. The researchers' bias may limit the results of visual analysis (Doerr, Mattoni, and Teune 2013). In participant observation, researchers struggle with the balance of over-identifying with or maintaining too much distance from their subject of research (Currier 2012). Again, to tackle this challenge it is important to document the researchers' own subjective stands in the research process, data selection, analysis, and evaluation. During Nicole's research in South Africa, as a white European middle-class person, her own subjectivity was a concern as she filmed autonomous activists confronting multinational corporations and the conservative backlash in post-Apartheid South Africa (Currier 2012). To protect activists who had to fear violent persecution (Currier 2012), Nicole turned off the camera in situations of direct action that openly challenged official policy and asked permission from the activists whose groups she wanted to study. Nicole noticed with surprise that her presence "disappeared" while in her role as camerawoman, providing her with access to conversations that she was unlikely to gain without having a seemingly neutral "technical" role. This is obviously a problematic and interesting aspect of audiovisual analysis one should keep in mind.

Adding a Quantitative Dimension to Visual Analysis, and Limitations

Based on Nicole's study on EuroMayday, we considered including quantitative elements in our analysis in two different ways. First, we could have counted the iconographic elements found through visual analysis to generalize the assumptions she made based on qualitative analysis. Second, we also could have coded the different categories of images that were created by EuroMayday groups across Europe. Again, the challenges involved the data reliability of online sources and online archives as well as limited accessibility, which

would have made it hard for us to assure we were using a sample that was representative enough to be quantified in a general way based on our findings. However, recently, media scholars interested in protest have shown how to use systematic quantitative methods in order to study how the selection and framing of images within newspapers influence the emotional resonance of political issues (Corrigall Brown 2012, 133). For example, Rohlinger and Klein show the dramatization of news coverage of the abortion debate in the United States through visuals of front-page newspaper articles (Rohlinger and Klein 2012). Likewise, systematic quantitative studies confirm that visual images become a powerful resource to de-legitimate dominant political actors. At the same time, activists also risk being stigmatized when portrayed within mainstream media (Wetzel 2012). Sociolinguist Critical Discourse Analysts and students of framing have also included images in their quantitative analysis. For example, Noa Milman (2013), confirming Wetzel's results (2012), shows that reporters pretended to be neutral in giving the same amount of voice to different groups yet refer to ethnic, gendered, and cultural stereotypes to de-legitimate resistance by stigmatized populations. In order to deal with the problem of interpretation, these researchers have started to use quantitative methods of visual analysis to systematically explore which kind of images are used when, by whom, and with what contentious effects on mobilization, strategizing, and outcomes of radical politics.

Conclusion: Using Three Steps of Visual Analysis

In this chapter, we have proposed a set of interdisciplinary methods that will help us to explore three fields of visual analysis; that is, the visual expression, representation, and visibility of social movements. Although distinct, all three areas are connected, and we have proposed three steps in conducting visual analysis: first, visual content analysis, second, iconographic interpretation, and third, the contextualization of images through the use of additional text-based, interpretative methods. Each of these steps is essential for conducting a critical visual analysis that contributes to social movement studies. We have highlighted that neither visual methods nor text-based, interpretative methods help us understand the complex political and cultural messages that we find in images diffused online via alternative social media, focusing on the example of images of migration in the case of the EuroMayday protests. We have argued for a triangular methodology to tackle the challenges of multiple, open-ended meanings condensed in images spread in multilingual, transnational public spaces to varying audiences and fields of mobilization.

As we have tried to show through the examples we studied, images are an important resource for protest actors to express themselves. Moreover, visual methods also advance the importance of interdisciplinary work, extending the established canon of social movement methods (della Porta 2014). If images of protest affect audiences and target groups, any analysis of political processes and any approaches focusing on the public sphere are well advised to consider the visual aspects of the social movements they are studying.

■ NOTES

1. Precarity, following its definition by analysts of global labor markets, “describes an increasing change of previously guaranteed permanent employment conditions into mainly worse paid, uncertain jobs” (Neilson and Rossiter 2005, quoted by Mattoni 2008, 2).
2. *Kony 2012* is a short film created by an NGO connected to an American and worldwide charity that launched a worldwide campaign on child soldiers that would lead to the arrest of the Ugandan guerilla leader and International Criminal Court fugitive Joseph Kony.
3. Interview with Zoe Romano, 6 November 2008, Milan.
4. E-mail interview with Zoe Romano, September 6, 2009.

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18 The Ethics of Social Movement Research

Stefania Milan

The processes by which knowledge is constructed, that is to say the selection of research questions and methods, as well as the researcher's epistemological commitments, have an impact on the knowledge that is generated. We can go as far as to claim that social "science is power, for all research findings have political implications" (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 6). If this is potentially the case with any type of research into the realm of social sciences, it is even more so for the study of political contention, social movements, and grass-roots activism (Gillan and Pickerill 2012). For instance, there is a close relation between the way researchers relate to the research objects and the type and quality of information they gather. It is a matter of relationship building as much as it is an epistemological and ontological question.

The field of social movement studies demands a special engagement with the ethical dimensions of research for a number of reasons. First, as social movements are bearers of "new ways of seeing the world" (Cox and Flesher Forminaya 2009, 1), social movement research cannot ignore the knowledge and the political imaginaries movements themselves have produced: not only should research operate within the boundaries of said political imaginaries, it should also be respectful of the processes and reflexive practices (often participatory, horizontal, "from below") that led to the creation of said knowledge. By way of example, researchers investigating participatory social movements should ideally try to embed some of those very same participatory mechanisms in their research design.

Second, there is a certain degree of risk associated with political dissent in authoritarian and democratic countries alike. Bringing activism under the spotlight and disclosing its dynamics might expose activists to surveillance as well as repression, jeopardizing their activities if not subjecting them to personal threats. Involving activists in a research project has consequences which cannot be ignored, and which should play a key role in designing and implementing any research project centered on political activism.

Third, participants in social movements are typically highly invested subjects who tend to expect from the researcher, and might even demand, some sort of political alignment with the principled ideas they embody. Access to the field might occasionally be negotiated on this ground, even by those

movements whose political views we might disagree with. An ethically informed positioning of the researcher in relation to the values and practices of the movement then becomes crucial, not only in view of gaining access, but also to further reciprocal understanding and mutual respect, and the preservation of some necessary boundaries between the two groups.

Fourth, research is “labor” not only for researchers, but also for research objects. In involving activists in a research project, the researcher competes for, and uses up, the activists’ limited resources such as time, which might otherwise be employed in a different way, including advancing the movement’s goals. Interrogating the notion of research as labor for both activists and researchers might help the latter to develop rational and realistic expectations concerning the engagement of the former in a research project; it will also foster equal and fair relationships between the two.

Engaging with ethical issues of research on social movements begins with recognizing that “there is no such thing as apolitical and/or neutral research” (Fuster Morell 2009, 21). It implies interrogating our role as researchers, by addressing the divide between research, action, and policy making, as well as the differences between the organizational cultures of academia and activism, respectively. But it also calls into question dimensions and processes internal to the social movements themselves, such as political learning, collective memory, impact, and self-assessment, which represent potential areas for effective collaboration between the realms of activism and academia. In practice, engaging with the ethical dimension of social movement research means envisioning a viable ethics of engagement that considers the specificities of the research objects and respects their political subjectivities. Questions worth asking include “To whom should research matter?” In other words, researchers should critically explore the purposes a research might serve; its intended and unintended consequences; what audiences are addressed; and which data serve which ends. “Higher order” epistemological questions like “What is equitable collaboration (“co-labor”) in principle, and how does this equitable collaboration work in practice?” could help in bridging the gulf created by two radically different organizational cultures and routines, academic individualism on the one hand and activist collectivism on the other, which would ultimately result in stronger empirical research and improved field relationships.¹

This chapter develops around four main “questions” which relate to the study of social movements and political dissent. They address distinct ethical sides of the research process, by interrogating the epistemological approach to socio-political research on social change activism (in other words, how do we get to know what we know?), and its ontological practice (what knowledge is produced, as well as methods and relation-building activities). Each question emerges within one or more phases of the research project, from the selection of research questions to the choice of methods, from data gathering to data analysis, theory building, and the publication of research results.

The first question examines the *relevance of the research* for the research objects, namely the activist community. It concerns both research questions and theory development, and starts from the premise that social movement researchers should concern themselves, not only with theory development, but also with the promotion of social change, movement building, and empowerment broadly conceived. The second question specifically addresses the *risks* for the researched that come along with the study of their dissenting practices. It reflects on the need to balance the imperative to know and investigate social dynamics, their frames and action repertoires, with the prerequisite to protect groups and individuals and their activities, which more often than not are fragile, even in democratic states. The third question deals with the gray area of *power*, in recognition of the unbalanced relationship that research typically establishes between the investigator and the research object. Social scientists usually operate from their positions in universities, “center[s] of power and privilege” (Lewis 2012, 228), whose dynamics of knowledge production and dissemination are at odds with the knowledge-sharing ethos embedded by movement activists, as well as with their “grassrootedness” (van Rooy 2004), in other words their experiential evidence. Finally, the fourth question addresses the issue of *accountability*, that is to say the obligation for social movement scholars to be accountable to their research objects, and to take into consideration their “social and political ontologies and epistemological practices” (Chesters 2012, 153).

Each “question” represents a challenge, and, as we shall see, comes along with a strong self-reflexive component. The assumption that guides this chapter is that reflexivity, or “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the ‘human instrument’” (Lincoln and Guba 2000, 183), is a central axis of the research process, and a mechanism central to the ethical engagement with the realm of activism. Reflexivity is an iterative and permanent process, and a dialogical one, transforming the researcher into the object of his own scrutiny, and potentially able to situate the researcher in a horizontal relationship with the research object. What is more, reflexivity, far from being simply an internal hidden process, must be rendered visible if it is to harness fair relationships with the research objects. Thus, not only should the questions of relevance, risk, power, and accountability be asked and taken into account throughout the investigation, they should also result in an explicit elaboration and description of the research in practice and on the field, one that explores the researchers’ standings and the advantages as well as limitations of their approach.

In what follows, I explore the four challenges, and I suggest for each of them a practical approach to fieldwork that takes both epistemology and methodology into account. I reflect on both the value and effectiveness of such an approach in relation to social movements and social change, as well as its desirability. The chapter builds on existing literature, and on my experience

with studying collective action on the Web, and radical Internet activism² in particular. It also offers some snapshots on the research practices implemented by the Media/Movement Research Action Project (MRAP), based at Boston College, Massachusetts, and directed by sociologists William Gamson and Charlotte Ryan, as one of the paradigmatic groups working to raise and answer ethical questions within the field of social movement studies.³

The Question of Relevance

In 1845, Karl Marx argued that “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” At the dawn of the twenty-first century, his verdict might be still valid for students of social movements who face a constant tension between objectivity and subjectivity, detachment and full participation.

With the progressive institutionalization of social movement studies, scholars have increasingly concentrated on theory development. If on the one hand this has fostered the growth, reputation, and visibility of the field, and has enhanced the quality of the research being produced, it often came at the expense of a fruitful connection between the producers of scholarly knowledge and the constituencies that should benefit from their work. As a result, “movement theorists often speak to themselves [. . .] the field often produces work that is distant from, and irrelevant to, the very struggle it purports to examine. The consequence is an artificial divide between the practice of social change and the study of such efforts” (Croteau et al. 2005, xii–xiii). But there is more to that. Chesters (2012) argues that the “implicit positivism that is underpinned in the idea that we live in a ‘social movement society,’” where protest has allegedly become a conventional form of democratic participation, has resulted in movements being perceived as “objects of knowledge for academics, rather than as knowledge-producers in their own right” (Chesters 2012, 145). This might result in social movements being reduced to “commodifiable objects of knowledge” to enhance one’s career, as opposed to acknowledging their role as creators and proponents of “alternative political imaginaries—a politics of possibilities—and theories of knowledge about how to actualise these imagined possibilities” (Chesters 2012, 145–7). Furthermore, the field is not yet fully immune from a tendency towards flattening social reality into opaque empirical objects, both cohesive and fixed, whereby the “collective reality exists as a thing” (Melucci 1988, 330), rather than a set of situated complex relations and casual mechanisms that continuously shape and reshape the movement.

One could address the question of the relevance of a given research project to social movements by questioning the nature of the relationship between

the researcher and the research subject. Croteau (2005) appropriately suggests raising the question of what knowledge should be produced and for whom. Flacks goes a step further, arguing that there is a “moral dimension” to social movement studies. In his view, “if your research was focused on the relatively powerless and disadvantaged, you had an ethical obligation to enable them to use the results [...] the study of social movements ought to provide movement activists with intellectual resources they might not readily obtain otherwise” (Flacks 2005, 7–8). The issue of morality goes beyond the boundaries of the public function of research often conducted with public funding, and into an uncharted land where not all researchers might want to wander. Without invading the private sphere of individual motivations, it might be useful to think about the presupposed moral dimension of social movement research in the guise of an ethical obligation on the researcher to provide knowledge that is both useful to and respectful of social actors, and away from its ancient Greek meaning of “norms guiding individual conduct” (which in turn seems to imply some erroneous superiority of academic knowledge over movement knowledge).

The question of relevance comes into play in the preliminary stages of a research project as well as in the theory development phase. For example, the perception of the existence of an artificial divide between practice and study of social change might have some practical consequences, most notably in negotiating access to the field. During my research on radical Internet activism, I was often met with the resistance of those activists who refused to engage with my interview questions or refused me access to activist meetings, on the ground that social movement research does not really address their concerns, its findings being often trivial and irrelevant to the daily work and challenges of the activists (Hintz and Milan 2010).

How can a researcher effectively address the question of relevance, possibly from the perspective of the activists themselves? What epistemological and ontological approaches can best work to empower social movements? In what follows, I briefly outline a series of possible approaches that take into account the challenge of producing scholarship able to speak also to social movements.

Perhaps the most familiar among the many processes of knowledge production involving both research subjects and objects is co-generative inquiry, which emphasizes joint collaborative efforts by research professionals and stakeholders. Within this framework, Stoecker (2005) called for increased activist involvement in the research process, greater attention to process, appropriate time lines, mutual respect, sustained communication, and a focus on effecting social change. Most of these suggestions emerged within critical approaches to qualitative research, and within the participatory action research perspective, whereby scholars are believed to “have a responsibility to do work that is socially meaningful and socially responsible” (Denzin and

Lincoln 2005, 34; see also Freire 1968, whose early work on the “pedagogy of the oppressed” has inspired many action research scholars).

Participatory action research “aims to solve pertinent problems in a given context through democratic inquiry in which professional researchers collaborate with local stakeholders to seek and enact solutions to problems of major importance to the stakeholders” (Greenwood and Levin 2005, 54). The latter are to be involved in the research process because of their situated knowledge of the problems under study. Validity criteria in participatory action research are strongly linked with action and the promotion of positive social change: co-generated knowledge is “deemed valid if it generates warrants for action. The core validity claim centres on the workability of the actual social change activity activist-researchers engaged in, and the test is whether or not the actual solution to a problem arrived at solving the problem” (Greenwood and Levin 2005, 54). Knowledge that is impossible to apply is “not ‘knowledge’ at all” (Greenwood and Levin 2005, 55).

MRAP researchers have long experimented with innovative participatory research involving social movements in view of empowering them. As a rule, they seek to design their research in order to provide movement organizations with intellectual resources, and jointly develop possible solutions to their problems. In an article co-authored with activist Karen Jeffreys of the Rhode Island Coalition against Domestic Violence (RICADV), and summing up a decade-long research relationship that emerged in the framework of MRAP, Charlotte Ryan explored the “two-way, dialogic exchanges that create new, generalizable knowledge” and can result in the “democratization of theorizing” (Ryan and Jeffreys 2008, 4). Ryan and Jeffreys argue that both theorizing and practice would benefit if scholars “embed themselves in movements, not simply as active citizens but as skilled learners” (Ryan and Jeffreys 2008, 3). The two groups, recognizing their complementary differences, should establish learning communities based on shared learning practices and work routines. Shared conceptual knowledge and methods must be developed over time, through “iterative cycles of dialog, action and reflection” (Ryan and Jeffreys 2008, 4). The long-term MRAP–RICADV collaboration shows how to build a learning community in practice. The two organizations sought to understand how movement organizers could implement effective agency in their interactions with mainstream media—a goal that, by their own admission, served both theorists and practitioners. How did these two organizations develop methods that “would meet academic standards yet be convenient, useful, and interesting for activists” (Ryan et al. 2012, 65)? When tasked with measuring RICADV’s rise in media standing and capacity, MRAP developed a collaborative history approach whereby participants from the two organizations would outline case studies of past RICADV media campaigns using documentary sources such as press releases, minutes of meetings, and news clips. In this way, they obtained a realistic picture of RICADV’s media planning

and strategies, which they then measured against the actual news coverage, thus identifying best practices and pitfalls (Ryan et al. 2012). As this example shows, by engaging in collaborative theorizing, social movement scholars can support activists' "ability to learn from practice" (Ryan and Jeffreys 2008, 3), and to embed their learning in the collective social memory. In turn, scholars benefit from activists' experience-based feedback, situated knowledge, and direct observation. To say it with Chesters, such an approach recognizes that "social activism produces critical subjectivities whose contextual and situated knowledge is both independent of the academy and valuable in its own right" (Chesters 2012, 146).

We can see the learning communities practices by Ryan and Jeffreys as a way of practicing an approach to co-generative inquiry that we will call *engaged research*. By engaged research, I mean those inquiries into the social world that, without departing from systematic, evidence-based, social science research, are designed to make a difference for disempowered communities and people beyond the academic community (Milan, 2010). They may, for example, address issues of concern to the disadvantaged, or may support the attempts by social movement activists to set the agenda of policy makers (see, e.g., Ryan et al. 2010); they may analyze the causes of structural inequality, or help activists by distilling useful concepts, approaches, and case studies from academic literature. Engaged research recognizes the status of movement activists as autonomous and sophisticated knowledge producers, ones that "can make sense out of what they are doing, autonomously of any evangelical or manipulative interventions of the researcher" (Melucci 1996, 389). Further, it starts by asking "what kinds of knowledge do movements produce" (Cox and Forminaya 2009, 1), and how they produce said knowledge, and seek to reproduce, whenever possible, similar practices of knowledge generation. (As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, researchers might try to mirror the participatory approach of movements in their investigation.)

However, engaged research does not call for the blurring of the boundaries between activists and researchers; rather, it acknowledges the reciprocal roles, with their own strengths and drawbacks, and tries to build on those. Engaged research represents one of the possible translations into practice of what Melucci (1992) called "situated epistemology," one that takes into account the contextual elements of knowledge production, as opposed to simply considering merely its outcomes, and, most importantly, embeds the investigation in a relationship, as opposed to standing above or outside the research object (Melucci 1996). Maintaining a critical distance is no longer an issue, as reciprocal roles and functions are discussed, embodied in the relationship, and respected throughout the process.

Engaged research departs from the acknowledgement that for the most part researchers and activists embody different motivations and investments, which are reflected in (and risk jeopardizing) the interaction between the two

groups. One such discrepancy is to be found in what the two “gain” from the research, which concerns, for example, material aspects and different understandings of “labor.” For instance, the interview process requires from both an investment of time and resources, but whereas for academics this is part of the day job and leads to material earnings, for the other side it is part of the leisure time and thus reduces the time that is available to gain income (or to work for social change). This imbalance cannot easily be resolved (by payments to the activists, for example) as it is grounded in a deeper clash between different organizational cultures, work ethics, and motivations, that is, between those whose interest in an issue is part of the job and those who work voluntarily on an issue for social and political reasons.

The discrepancy in motivations and investments, as well as the question of relevance, can be effectively addressed by selecting research questions and methods that matter not only to scholars but also to the activist community. When conducting engaged research with radical Internet activists, I tried to put the research design at the service of both activism and scientific data gathering. In practice, it meant that research questions had to relate closely to the daily interpersonal practices of the activists for them to accept the research as legitimate and engage with it, even when those needs were not immediately self-evident, nor easy to translate into research questions functional to the research. For example, a question on personal motivations and individual engagement, which at a first sight might not seem conducive to movement empowerment, by their own admission helped some activists to reflect on themselves in a way they rarely do, busy as they are in running Internet servers. In their own words, the questions “initiated long interesting discussions within the group. That is a very welcome side effect of the whole thing. It helps us to clarify our positions on the issues” (Milan 2013, 184). Finally, methods themselves can be a vehicle of empowerment. The Global Media Monitoring Project, for example, is a recurrent media-monitoring exercise whereby quantitative analysis of media content is carried out by a worldwide network of activists trained for the occasion. Non-experts act as coders in a scientifically sound research project that aims to identify unbalanced gender representations in the media. In monitoring for a day the media they regularly consume, activists engage in first-person awareness raising, with the potential of becoming sounder advocates for a fair gender representation in the media.⁴

The Question of Risk

“In the past, we did not participate in any surveys/interviews etc. It was a decision based on the assumption that social science[s] are too often a police science plus that it is never clear who is going to use this research,” replied

a collective of radical Internet activists I contacted for an interview (Milan 2013, 182). In fact, activists might consider the collection of information about them as potentially detrimental to their activities, if not dangerous to their persona. For example, an activist explained his opposition to research on social movements as follows: “mapping out the way networks inside the activist movement work can be very harmful for the groups, and for other groups as well, as it gives insight in the least understood part of activist movements. And I’m very happy most police forces and security services do not understand that part at all” (Milan 2013, 184). On this point, Flacks argued that “one ought to be sensitive to the possible ways your work could be used to perpetuate established social arrangements and repress opposition” (2005, 7).

The question of risk surfaces at different stages in the research project: research design, data analysis, and theory building. It is important that the researcher takes active steps to protect the activities and the identity of the research objects, negotiating with the latter how (i.e., using what methods) activism should be approached, and what can be revealed. In what follows, I touch upon a couple of aspects connected to the question of risk.

When considering options for research design, we ought to weight the risk associated with both the research question and the method we plan to use. Whereas interviewing techniques leave room to the interviewee to decide what to reveal and what to conceal, according to his or her own assessment of the risk involved, other methods might contain undesired hazards—and these hazards might not be immediately visible. For example, does archival research on internal documents encourage present-day surveillance? Does social network analysis, by exposing relationships and social graphs, unveil connections and interactions that activists might prefer to keep concealed? Does protest event analysis, by exposing recurrent strategies, contribute to weaken the mobilizations to come? Without demonizing any of these methods, these early-stage decisions appear crucial if we are to take Flacks’ (2005) point seriously.

When it comes to data collection, one should notice how often activists disguise their identity behind pseudonyms, or behind masks during protest demonstrations. Research can violate this attempt to remain outside the public (and, particularly, government) spotlight. What is more, protecting the anonymity of interviewees and their projects during data collection and analysis is particularly challenging in times of tight cybersecurity measures and blanket cybersurveillance plans. It is a must for researchers to protect the identity and privacy of activists by negotiating the level of disclosure of sensitive information, up to the point of avoiding using real names and disclosing information that might facilitate identification by third parties. In addition, in the case of sustained online exchanges or online interaction involving exchange of sensitive information, researchers should encourage activists to use e-mail encryption and routing software able to defend both parties against traffic analysis and other forms of network surveillance. But

researchers should also resist any request for activist data by law enforcement, while taking steps to protect the digital supports where data is physically stored, for example by encrypting computer hard drives. Furthermore, they should be aware of the risks in terms of privacy and surveillance connected with the use of commercial e-mail services such as Gmail, as well as commercial social networking services like Facebook, for activist–academic interactions. This is something that often escapes the activists’ scrutiny but should nonetheless be kept in mind by scholars who commit to protect their informants. Along these lines, a radical Internet collective has recently called on movement activists to abandon commercial platforms in reaction to their built-in security flaws and threats to privacy, and to avoid endangering activist projects and initiatives by relying on these services (Nadir 2012). This is a message scholars ought to take seriously.

In response to the activists’ concerns about state surveillance and social science being a “police science,” it is essential to constantly question the amount and quality of data that is gathered about activists, and to plan carefully the release of such data and its publication in view of reducing the potential harm for research partners. This means not only to anonymize individual and group names, when needed or asked for, but also to look critically at what connections between groups are exposed (cf. the risks associated with social network analysis), what tactics are revealed, and to weigh the costs and benefits of each release. During my work with radical Internet activists, I realized how published research results on, for example, group size, work practices, motivations, networks, and alliances, might play into the hands of those who want to shut down alternative communication infrastructure. In deciding to investigate groups that seek to avoid exposure and usually do not operate publicly as recognizable entities, I have committed to avoiding the release of any sensitive information about actions, strategies, and networks I might have come across during fieldwork—even if at times this went against my calling as a social science scholar to communicate research findings.

Finally, one should keep in mind the core imperatives of the so-called “hacker ethics”: “do not harm,” “leave no damage,” and “leave things as you found them (or better)” (Levy 1984). These simple and easy-to-remember injunctions represent universally attainable ethical guidelines for research that takes the question of risk seriously.⁵

The Question of Power

A closer look at activist–research interactions reveals a set of divides that concern differences in organizational cultures and routines, in motivations and values, and in the gains and potential losses of the research for each

side. These differences can be subsumed to the notion of power, which in turn speaks to the unbalanced relation between the subject and the object of research. The question of power plays a role in particular in the phases of methods selection and data gathering, but should be kept on the horizon throughout the research project, and even after its conclusion (including, for example, in the publication phase). It is a matter of relationality and reciprocity, and it entails considering the “unfolding of obligations and limitations developing from the relational dimension of the interaction. This requires one’s own position of power, security or vulnerability to be open to analysis and contest” (Chesters 2012, 155). The question of power becomes even more crucial for those doing research on, for example, indigenous communities (Lewis 2012), or particularly historically disenfranchised groups who might have suffered from adverse ontological elaborations put forward, among others, by academics.

To be sure, suspicion towards academics and their endeavors is quite diffused amongst movement activists. Often, this does not come out of the blue, but is based on direct experience. Activists might be left with the impression that researchers “take advantage” of activists merely to further their careers, while activists and their movements do not benefit from the research. Collaboration between the two often ends as soon as researchers have sufficient material to meet their needs. In addition, academic careers are based on reputation and thus on the “name” of the researchers, who, through research results and publications, will to some extent engage in the exercise of definition and assessment of the instances of activism they have studied. The researchers may then assume a position from which they end up speaking “on behalf of” the movement, and are recognized as an authority in the field, while those who actually create counter-expertise and engage in the action remain out of the spotlight. For all of these reasons, researchers might not be welcome in the field, and might have to engage in lengthy negotiation processes with the activists prior to any investigation. As Ryan and Jeffreys acknowledged, “In settings in which communities have endured periodic research infestations with little ostensible gain, scholars may need to engage in prolonged dialogues and experiments with activist partners to clarify the value of scholarly research” (2008, 16).

Whereas academia is an individualized endeavor, with individual researchers typically working on their own research projects and developing an individual reputation for themselves, activism is typically based on a collective approach. As a way of addressing the individual vs collective tension, and of safeguarding the collective nature of activism, one can bring back to the center of the research design the relevant entity, typically the group or network. This may have practical implications, for example when responses to interview questions are formulated by the whole group over prolonged periods of time, as opposed to by individual informants, or when complex qualitative designs

are privileged over survey research; but it has implications also for the broader nature of researcher–activist interaction and understanding. As one of my interview partners noted, Internet activist groups “are collective enterprises,” and addressing individuals within the group means “breaking down the collective dimension of the group” (Hintz and Milan 2010, 840). Consequently, I engaged in online asynchronous interviews (Kivits 2005) that involved the whole group, considerably extending the duration of the data collection phase (some interview processes lasted over a year!).

Researchers might also consider adjusting methodologies and ways of relating to research partners to the ways “in which social practices are defined and experienced” (Hine 2005, 1). In other words, researchers should try to reach social actors where they feel more comfortable, in the very *locus* of their activism, be it offline or online, in the streets or in policy arenas. They must also act in accordance with the rules of interaction typical of that environment. As Hine wrote, “Social research methods have always had to be adaptive. Methods, after all, are not neutral devices” (Hine 2005, 2–7). For activists who are familiar with and comfortable in technologically mediated environments, such as radical Internet activists, e-mail interviews have proved to be an excellent, and perhaps the best, method of eliciting thick data out of groups and individuals. Internet, however, is socially and culturally situated. Creating connections, situating oneself in the activists’ environments, and relating to their value systems can lead to adopting their communication practices, including styles and jargon.⁶ With Internet activists, for example, closing the gap between different ways of interacting and communicating (one based on the name and reputation of the individual versus one fiercely protecting anonymity and putting group action before individuals) implied the adoption of a nickname and an e-mail address from an activist provider, the implementation of e-mail encryption, and the publication of research findings in accessible formats and platforms whenever possible (or the leaking of copyrighted publications whenever necessary). In general, it helps if the researcher shows familiarity with the field dynamics and the issues that are relevant to the interview partners—in the case of radical techies, issues of privacy, surveillance, and alternative models of intellectual property and knowledge sharing. Finally, as we have already seen, collaboration with activists typically implies an imbalance in both the investment in, and the material gains from, a research project. In the process of developing strategies to address this problem that are contingent to each project, one should discuss with interview partners the potential gains and outcomes for each side. As a reward for participation, the researcher might also earmark an amount of financial resources to be awarded to activist projects, or reserve some research or private time to be devoted to activities able to support activism on the ground (e.g., translations or copy-editing).

Bridging the significant gulf between researchers and activist groups requires a serious effort to build a research relationship based on clarity, reciprocal respect, and trust. As Kvale (1996, 14) noted, an interview should be seen as “inter-view;” that is, an “interchange of views between two people conversing on a theme of mutual interest.” This is deemed valid for participant observation as well, and to a lesser extent to survey research. For qualitative data collection in particular, it appears to be crucial to remember that the Latin meaning of “conversation” is “wandering together with”: hence, creating equal and mutually comfortable “wandering” circumstances is essential. As interviews and surveys, and to a lesser extent participant observation, imply unequal relations, with the interviewer creating and controlling an artificial situation and defining topics and questions, particular effort is needed on the side of the researcher to mitigate this asymmetric exercise of power. In the process of negotiating access to the field and in situating themselves in the middle of action, researchers might find useful the classification of field-roles by Snow, Benford, and Anderson (1986). The three scholars have identified four archetypical fieldwork roles, namely the “controlled skeptic,” the “ardent activist,” the “buddy–researcher,” and the “credentialed expert.” Each field-role yields to a certain type of information. The buddy-researcher position, for example, fosters a “blending of the role of researcher and friend” which “entailed receiving as well as giving” (Snow et al. 1986, 384).

Finally, building a trusted relationship means allowing for extended exchange before the actual interview starts and long after the interview is over. This exchange, often in the form of e-mail, can last for weeks or even months before data collection can begin; the same is true for the cases in which the connection is kept alive by some form of collaboration between researcher and activists that might have emerged in the course of fieldwork. However costly, these exchanges are vital for researchers to establish themselves as trustworthy interlocutors; face-to-face meetings and participant observation at activist gatherings helps to forge meaningful connections, as does being responsive and collaborative after the end of the research project.

The Question of Accountability

Activists tend to hold researchers accountable for their doings—and this is particularly true in the case of research methods that require first-person engagement, such as interviews, participant observation, and surveys.⁷ For example, activists may challenge the self, motivations, and standpoints of scholars: particularly when dealing with social justice issues, researchers find themselves constantly interrogated about their motivations and the aims of the inquiry—a process that might occasionally be emotionally demanding. Hence, studying activism might force researchers to re-negotiate and

re-define their self as well as their ontological and epistemological commitments, in interaction with their research objects. Reflexivity then becomes a central axis of the research process. Reflexivity is “a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research itself” (Guba and Lincoln 2005, 210). Reinharz singled out three distinct categories of selves we embody in the field: “research-based selves,” “brought selves” (those shaping our standpoints), and “situationally created selves” (1997, 5). Each has a distinctive voice that comes into play in the field. Interrogating the three of them might help the researcher to understand how these selves influence one’s research.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that this might cause, researchers have to accept this very personal exposure as a legitimate part of the conversation. The difficulty is not just the need for self-reflection, which may at times be unpleasant or may even lead to serious crises, but more prosaically the need for consistent engagement in developing and continuously reshaping one’s identity on the field, the objectives of the research project, and the researchers’ motivations, in a way that is acceptable to the researched.

The question of accountability intervenes in particular in the phases of data analysis and theory building, but should play a role also within data dissemination and publication of research findings. It addresses numerous challenges: trying to find a common ground despite the different “professional” languages; the tension between individualism and collectivism; and the emphasis on “practices” of practitioners vs the accent on theory development among academics. In practice, accountability translates in a set of measures that, if taken seriously, contribute to building bridges between academia and the social world from a perspective of social change. One such measure is translation. By translation, I indicate the conversion of a unit of meaning (e.g., a research question, a theoretical concept, an empirical finding) expressed in a certain language (in our case, the professional and epistemological language[s] of social sciences) into an equivalent meaning in another grammar (here, a discourse that can be understood and “used” by activists, i.e., “activist data” and action-oriented knowledge). It concerns the research cycle from beginning to end, but is particularly relevant in the dissemination of findings; it operates in two directions, from the researcher to the activist and vice-versa. In practice it means, for example, making the research questions not only intelligible and available to our research partners, but also meaningful to their ontological concerns. It requires adopting research methods that respect the ways social practices are experienced by practitioners. It also bounds researchers to share their research findings in an activist-friendly format useful for action or self-reflection, in view of taking findings back to the field (Adler et al. 1986).⁸ But, especially, it requires both researchers and activists to engage in a process of mutual learning, which is at the core of conducting research *with* social groups, processes, and events (as opposed to research *about* them).

Whereas most current social science is research *about* (social groups, processes, events—research that tends to treat the movements’ concerns “as secondary or relative to their own specific ontology/cosmology” [Chesters 2012, 148]), engaged researchers aim to make research *with* (i.e., in collaboration with) these subjects. Research *about* is usually considered to be the only objective, and therefore the only scientifically sound research, on the grounds that the observer is sufficiently detached from the object of study. Research *with*, however, is grounded on a similarly solid scientific basis. But it requires a commitment from both sides to collaborate and come to terms with the reciprocal differences; it also demands a long-term time frame, recurrent cycles of reflection and interaction, and constant adjustments along the way. Furthermore, research *with* is not only possible but also desirable. If we cannot deny the existence of a potential contradiction between engagement and academic rigor, the former does not have to come at the expense of evidence-based scientific research. The types of questions being asked, and the way we ask them, as well as the methods we select to approach social actors may partially differ, but the results can be equally systematic. It is at this stage that reflectivity comes in again: researchers should be ready to regularly question their identities and roles as researchers immersed in a complex and challenging social world, torn between science and action.

Conclusions on the Ethics of Social Movement Research

This chapter started off with the ambition to provide a ready-to-use ethical checklist for research on social movements and political contention. It does not aim to substitute the ethical codes developed and improved over time by a variety of national research councils, or by professional organizations of the caliber of the American Anthropological Association.⁹ Instead, it outlines four very concrete questions researchers should ask themselves throughout the research project and in recursive exercises of self-reflection, and against which they should ideally weight their epistemological and ontological commitments as well as their methodological choices. The chapter shows how “[m]ethod cannot be separated from ontology, and ontology has epistemological consequences,” as Chesters nicely put it (2012, 157). Here, ontology was taken to indicate the knowledge and prefigurative politics movements typically embed, whereby epistemology designates the way knowledge is produced by both activists and researchers. Table 18.1 summarizes the four questions addressed in the chapter, and offers a bird’s eye view on potential approaches and methods to be used in the field.

Engaging with the ethical dimensions of social movement research, however, is not an easy task, and not one that is encouraged by a system, that of contemporary

Table 18.1 Overview of Ethical Challenges in Social Movement Research, and Tips for Research Design and Fieldwork

Challenges	Phases of the research project	Approach: tips for research design and fieldwork
<p><i>1. Relevance</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artificial divide between the study and the practice of social change • Research that empowers social movements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research design (development of research questions in particular) • Data gathering • Theory building • Data dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory action research and/or engaged research as epistemological approaches • Establish learning communities • Establish iterative cycles of two-way dialogue, action, and reflection • Select research questions that matter also to activists • Take into account different motivations and investments • Consider employing methods that can empower activists
<p><i>2. Risk</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveillance/repression • Cybersecurity/cybersurveillance/privacy online • “Social science is police science” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research design • Data analysis • Theory building • Data dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess whether your research perpetuates established unequal social relations, or is likely to foster repression • Protect privacy and anonymity of interviewees • Store data safely and anonymously • Negotiate access and disclosure with activists • Consider data from the perspective of activists • Learn from the hackers: “Do not harm,” “Leave no damage,” and “Leave things as you found them (or better)”
<p><i>3. Power</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationality • Clash of organizational cultures (including tension between individualism and collectivism) • Differences in material resources • Asymmetrical relation between interviewer and interviewee, between observer and observed • Methods are not neutral tools but might shape knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method selection • Data gathering • Data analysis • Theory building • Data dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize material differences between research and activists, and build a fair research relationship that accounts for those disparities • Situate the researcher in the daily environments of the research partners • Respect group dynamics and select the unit of analysis accordingly • Adjust the way of relating to research partners (and the methods to be used) to their social practices • Plan for an adequate time frame able to foster a prolonged dialogue
<p><i>4. Accountability</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability towards social actors • Reciprocity • Knowledge sharing and accessibility of scientific knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis • Theory building • Data dissemination and publication of research findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on yourself as a researcher • Choose between “research with” vs “research about” • Transfer your data and findings (“activist data”) • Translate your research and your knowledge into something that can be understood and used by activists • Make your data and your research available as open data and through open-access arrangements

academia, that tends to reward speedy publication and cost-efficient research projects. I do hope that those engaged in academic thinking will be encouraged to take up the challenge, and situate themselves in a position so as to “participate in the uncertainty, testing the limits of their instruments and of their ethical values” (Melucci 1996, 395) jointly with the activists they observe. In doing so, they would take an active part in bridging the gap between the practice of prefigurative politics and its study, by contributing to “democratize theorizing,” and in the long run, to fix the endangered relationship between social movements and academia, and their respective epistemologies.

■ NOTES

1. The author wishes to thank Charlotte Ryan (MRAP) for the many inspiring conversations, and for proposing some of the questions listed here. My research, and this chapter, would have been very different without the MRAP luminous example.
2. By radical Internet activism I mean collective action in cyberspace that addresses network infrastructure or exploits the infrastructure’s technical and ontological features for political or social change. Examples include the creation of alternative infrastructures of digital communication, online civil disobedience, distributed denial of service attacks aimed at making websites temporarily unavailable, and leaking classified information. Radical Internet activism provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on the interaction between researchers and activists: inspired by the anarchist values of autonomy and self-determination, radical Internet activists do not aim to influence institutional policy-making processes by lobbying, advocacy, or protest, but rather seek to bypass regulatory, technological, or political constraints, and engage in prefigurative politics by creating their own digital communication infrastructure. Usually organized as collectives of equals, they reject any formal leadership and representation, and they are critical of mainstream academia (Milan 2013). All interviews with activists quoted in this chapter can be found in Milan 2013.
3. MRAP (<<http://www.mrap.info>>, accessed April 25, 2014) was created in 1985–86 by a group of Boston-based scholars and students of social movements addressing media-movement dynamics. Its mission statement read, “MRAP works with underrepresented and misrepresented communities to identify and challenge barriers to democratic communication, develop proactive messages and strategies, and build ongoing communication capacity” (Ryan et al. 2012, 64). In its first decade alone, the group ran workshops with over 200 organizations. At a later stage, MRAP members decided to privilege groups able to commit over time, in recognition that it takes years to establish an adequate communication capacity. As a collective persona, MRAP members put much emphasis on the social practice of research acting “as a conscious change agent in concert with movement partners” (Ryan et al. 2012, 64).
4. Organized every five years since 1995, the GMMP (<<http://www.whomakesthenews.org/>>, accessed April 7, 2014) is the largest global media monitoring and advocacy project, where academics collaborate with non-governmental and community organizations on the ground. It is currently coordinated by the non-governmental organization World Association for Christian Communication.
5. The hacker culture emerged in the 1970s around the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (USA). The highly skilled software writers enjoyed experimenting with the components of a system with the aim of modifying and ameliorating it; they operated under a set of tacit values that later became known as “hacker ethics.”

6. Such familiarization with the case study, however, calls for a good deal of preliminary participant observation as a necessary pre-condition for any effective research, be it qualitative or quantitative in nature.
7. The problem is not so pronounced when the researcher keeps at a distance, or engages in methods that do not require direct interaction with activists, such as comparative-historical analysis, social network analysis, or certain types of protest event analysis and archival research.
8. Once again, hacker ethics provides useful guidelines. Rooted in the idea of an e-commons developed in the realm of computer science, hacker ethics postulates universal access to information and knowledge as a vehicle for individual empowerment and collective improvement—a far cry from the walled gardens of academic publishing.
9. See, for example, the AAA Statement on Ethics in its subsequent versions (<<http://www.aaanet.org/profdev/ethics/>>, accessed April 7, 2014).

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