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RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS
AND CHANGE VOLUME 47

**METHODOLOGICAL
ADVANCES IN RESEARCH
ON SOCIAL MOVEMENTS,
CONFLICT, AND CHANGE**

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FOREWORD

During the politicized debates of the 2010s over National Science Foundation (NSF) funding for political science (and to a lesser extent sociology and psychology), many argued against popular branding of the social sciences as “soft” and the natural sciences as “hard.” Going further, the Nature Editorial Board (2012) wrote, “Because they deal with systems that are highly complex, adaptive and not rigorously rule-bound, the social sciences are among the most difficult of disciplines, both methodologically and intellectually.” Biomedical and physical sciences can be reasonably assured that there are fewer variables involved in mass-produced mice or isotopes and that their subjects’ biases, lack of self-awareness, etc. do not influence findings. Conflict and activism add additional layers of difficulty to our work, adding potential intent to subjects’ participation and substantial bias in records and governmental funding. As this volume makes clear, nearly all of the potential sources of data within studies of social change, conflict, and movements have a vested and/or political interest in our topics, with which scholars must contend.

I marvel at the inventiveness of RSMCC scholars, who use drones, satellite imagery, recently uncovered archives, the latest computer programs and mathematical models, sheer tenacity, and so much more to get their sources. Technology has rapidly opened possibilities for new research methods since the classic volumes on scholarly practices within social movements by Klandermans and Staggenborg (2002) and della Porta (2014), and those about research in peace and conflict (Druckman, 2005; Höglund & Öberg, 2011; Mazurana et al., 2013). As new methods are developed, though, their potential, ethical application, and limitations must be examined. The process of “how” intellectuals determine what is real or what the data suggest must always be under scrutiny. This entire book offers a great deal of insight into the epistemology of social change, movements, and conflict. It has been my pleasure to support Eric Schoon and Thomas Maher as they produced this important volume.

Lisa Leitz
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