

## Anna Zhelnina

James M. Jasper and Jan Willem Duyvendak, eds. *Players and Arenas: The Interactive Dynamics of Protest*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015. 322 pp. ISBN 978-90-8964-708-5.

*Anna Zhelnina is a senior researcher at the Sociological Institute of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, and an associate professor at the Department of Sociology, Saint-Petersburg School of Social Sciences and Area Studies, Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg. Address for correspondence: 7-ia Krasnoarmeiskaia ul., 25, Saint Petersburg, 190005, Russia. azhelnina@gmail.com.*

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*Players and Arenas* aims at promoting the strategic interaction perspective (SIP)—a theoretical effort to bridge the gap between the structural paradigm and cultural theories in political sociology and social movements studies. Structural approaches seek to establish causal links between relatively stable factors (features of the political and economic environment) and a movement's emergence and success. The most influential of the structural approaches is political process theory, with its core concept of political opportunity (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Cultural theories call for more attention to emotions, morality, and choices made by protestors, claiming that these can help protesters recognize and *create* political opportunities for their movement's development, thus allowing for more agency of movement actors.

The SIP tries to reconcile these perspectives "by giving equal and symmetric weight to protestors and to the other players whom they engage, and by focusing equally on players and the arenas in which they interact" (p. 9). Players engage with one another to achieve certain strategic goals but also deal with internal contradictions, set priorities, and choose strategies. Almost all political players (except when we are talking about individuals) are compound players who have to do some work to build solidarity and achieve the "necessary fiction" of unity. Therefore, "players are also arenas," where these interactions and rituals take place.

Arenas are bundles "of rules and resources that allow and encourage certain kinds of interactions to proceed, with something at stake" (p. 14). This is the structural dimension of the framework; arenas are similar to institutions (classically defined as sets of roles, norms, and practices) but are less "mysterious": one can observe an arena; it is supposed to be a physical space where interaction happens like a conference hall or a city square where a street protest takes place. Arenas, as James M. Jasper claims, "capture most of what has gone under the banner of structure": physical spaces and constraints associated with them, formal and informal rules, and, importantly, "past decisions, invested resources, and cultural meanings" (pp. 16, 17).

*Players and Arenas* provides an interesting example of a theorist not writing a single-authored book about their framework, but rather making others implement this theorist's concepts. After a theoretical introduction by Jasper, 12 chapters explore a range of players and their interactions in different arenas, concluded by an in-depth theoretical exploration of the benefits of SIP and the shortcomings of its alternatives by Jan Willem Duyvendak and Olivier Fillieule.

The chapters are divided into three sections exploring different kinds and dimensions of players. Part 1, "Insiders and Supporters," looks "inside" the players. Francesca Polletta and Kelsy Kretschmer in the first chapter analyze movement factions, challenging the popular cliché that factions kill players. Using the example of the radical and nonviolent branches within the US civil rights movement, they show how these factions helped the movement to make some strategic gains. Ann Mische's chapter on "Fractal Arenas" investigates the subdivisions within a movement (the Student Congress in Brazil in 1997) and demonstrates how strategic and stylistic differences generated a combination of challenges for movement leaders. In chapter 3, Edward T. Walker looks at charitable foundations as players with their own logic and internal dynamics and not just as sources of funding for social movements and advocacy groups. This chapter is also the only one that uses statistical evidence to reveal the effect of interorganizational and external factors on foundations' giving. Although the microsociological paradigm seems to work best with in-depth qualitative analysis, this chapter shows the methodological openness of the framework. Christian Scholl's chapter is the first one to focus primarily on an arena where players (counterglobalization movements, intergovernmental organizations, governments, police, and the media) interacted: the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. The author, however, also accounts for all these players as compound players who spend time and other resources on internal interactions as well as interactions with other players.

Part 2, "Market Players," has chapters on corporations, professions, and trade unions. In his chapter on corporations and the antisweatshops campaign, Philip Balsiger turns the static "environment" of protest movements into players performing different strategic counteractions. Using a sports metaphor popular among proponents of the "players and arenas" framework, he talks about the usual representation of protesters and their "targets" as "a tennis player firing balls against the wall": the movement's opponent, a corporation or a state, "is pictured as a wall: exhibiting certain structural characteristics—the wall may be made of uneven concrete, with spots where the ball rebounds particularly well—it is incapable of strategy, it cannot 'play'" (p. 119). This chapter applies and proves in a convincing way SIP's valuable assumption that the "wall" can also play, that states and corporations are not just "targets" but players like the protesters. Frank Dobbin and Jiwook Jung's chapter on professions explores previously overlooked players (human resources professionals and fund managers) and the arena of corporate policy. Ruth Milkman's chapter on labor movement depicts US trade unions as a unique player playing both the "inside" and the "outside" game: part of the establishment and a challenger of the status quo at the same time.

Part 3, "Experts, Intellectuals, and the Media," addresses the issue of players' diversity. Chapter 8 by Walter Nicholls and Justus Uitermark focuses on the specific skills of representation that intellectuals contribute to the movement dynamic, using it *for* the movement but also to exercise power *over* the movement. In the next chapter, Alissa Cordner, Phil Brown, and Margaret Mulcahy explore the role of scientists and public health officials interacting with other players in various regulatory arenas. Chapter 10 by Edwin Amenta, Neal Caren, and Celina Tierney deals with social movements and social movements scholars' favorite—the media. Shifting roles of players is the focus of Silke Heumann and Jan Willem Duyvendak's chapter on religious groups as political players. They demonstrate that a powerful onlooker may be turned into a player as a result of a movement's strategic action, as in the case of pro-life movement in Nicaragua that recruited the Catholic Church to engage with pro-life politics. Chapter 12 on bystander publics and protoplayers by Hahrie Han and Dara Z. Strolovich continues the topic of recruiting new players to join the game.

The best contributions in the collection are the ones that expand the scope of analysis from social movements alone to a larger picture: they look at nonmovement players, inside movements, or at differences between different categories of players. SIP has all characteristics of a general social theory that can be helpful for our understanding of a broad range of social interactions, and as every general theory it leaves some room for improvement, clarification, and adjustment—and there are some efforts to challenge and adjust this theory even among the chapters of this book.

Amenta et al., applying the players and arenas framework to an analysis of news media in political interactions, note the deficiency of lumping all actors and spaces of interaction into just two major categories. For example, distinguishing between "arenas," "galleries," and "backstage" (Ferree et al. 2002) accounts for the structural diversity among spaces of interaction: there are spaces where players prepare to enter arenas for an actual "game," where the game takes place, and where the powerful spectators make decisions while watching the game. Similarly, not all actors are equally players: movement actors are "wannabe players" who can or cannot be granted access to an arena and to the game by the news media, which can take on different roles toward different players—treating "political institutional actors" such as institutional officials and opposition political leaders as equal players, acting as "referees," the media can turn into "team owners and stadium security with regard to movement actors" (p. 233).

The core concepts of SIP will sound familiar to readers of social science books: many theories before SIP have tried to "account for this structuring of the social world" (p. 300) going back to Emile Durkheim's term "social differentiation." Duyvendak and Fillieule in the conclusion review those alternative concepts: fields, organizational fields, sectors, networks, policy domains, and so on. The closest competitor of SIP, however, is the theory of strategic action fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2012) that builds on Pierre Bourdieu's concept but adds a social movement twist to it. Doug McAdam, one of the coauthors of the theory of fields, is also one of the main figures

in political process theory. His “structural” origins are visible: the theory of fields, although aiming at the same goal as the SIP (relaxing the imperative of external factors and allowing for some agency of the players), assumes that the sphere of social movements is better organized and creates an autonomous domain of action and competition. The world of social movements, however, as SIP proponents argue, is not “sufficiently institutionalized, structured, and unified to correspond with Bourdieu’s definition” (p. 303).

The SIP attempts to “demystify” politics by looking at the here-and-now interactions of players and the outcomes of these interactions. This seeming clarity has its tradeoffs: there is a risk of overlooking the inequality in access to resources and different “roles” of players, as well as some difficulties in accounting for less here-and-now, observable arenas, such as digital social media platforms. In the whirlwind of nonphysical spaces of interaction it is not entirely clear how to identify an arena: is a person in front of her computer posting to a social media platform the sole player in the physical arena of her bedroom, or is the arena the conglomerate of cables, gadgets, screens, and electrical signals that allow people from around the world to fight about politics? *Players and Arenas* seems to still inhabit the world of a multitude of more or less traditional arenas—rooms, halls, streets—and is yet to be tested on less observable objects.

## REFERENCES

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