

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Ann Mische, *Partisan Publics: Communication and Contention across Brazilian Youth Activist Networks*. Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, 458 pp. \$US 39.50 hardcover (978-0-691-12494-0)

This challenging book by Ann Mische analyzes the changing composition of youth activist networks in a period of democratization in Brazil, from the late 1970s to the late 1990s. It will be of great interest to social movement scholars, social network analysts, and students of Latin American, especially Brazilian, politics.

Partisan Publics examines the multiple affiliations of activists in different kinds of movements and organizations. Mische conducted ethnographic research in the 1990s, interacting with participants in a wide variety of groups, and attending organizational events of the student movement, student course associations, religious groups, antidiscrimination organizations, business organizations, and youth factions/wings of several political parties. She follows the trajectories of young Brazilian activists through intersecting institutional sectors, including religious, student, partisan, NGO, antidiscrimination, professional, and business groups. She provides a structural analysis of activists' careers, and demonstrates how these intersections change over time. She argues that shifting structural relations lead to variations in the opportunities and challenges faced by different cohorts of activists, and emphasizes their mediating role: "On the one hand, young activists located at the intersections of an expanding and diversifying field contributed to innovation, institution-building, and new forms of cross-sectoral communication. On the other hand, their interactions led at times to competition, polarization, and institutional paralysis or breakdown" (p. 19).

Mische draws on an extraordinarily wide selection of theoretical perspectives. From the vantage point of the social movement literature, the work is most closely aligned with the "contentious politics" framework. While there is much emphasis on structural relations, and upon political opportunities, Mische is also a superb cultural theorist, and much of the book focuses on cultural aspects of youth politics. (The influence of her mentors, Charles Tilly — the great scholar of social movements and almost everything else — and Harrison White, a leading social network

theorist, is evident.) In line with this cultural emphasis, Mische examines in detail the communication styles developed by activists, and how these different styles shaped youth politics in Brazil in different ways — for example toward competition versus collaboration, or a focus on ideas versus actions. To this end she provides an in-depth analysis of how communication styles are shaped, and their consequences. Mische emphasizes that communication styles are not just a function of the structure and dynamics of a particular organizations, as “variation in styles of political communication resulted ... also from the positions of activists at the intersections of multiple types of organizations” (p. 19).

Two central questions are addressed in the book. First, how do people respond to the challenges of moving through multiple social worlds? This is answered by exploring individuals and organizations embedded in a multiorganizational field and how people balance and choose amongst multiple identities at particular times. Second, how do we combine our civic commitments with partisan and particularistic pursuits? Mische maintains that while the conventional view is that it is better to emphasize civic engagement over partisan struggle, “Partisanship is not only necessary and unavoidable, but it can also, in some circumstances, be a creative, motivating, and institutionally generative source of civic involvement and reform” (p. 23). Mische devotes many pages to considering the relative merits of partisanship versus cooperation.

The book is a treasure trove of theoretical insights for analyzing culture and structure in social movements. In this regard Mische introduces a number of very useful analytical typologies. One example is a typology that locates four leadership positions in an multisectoral field: leaders, entrenched leaders, explorers, and focused activists. These different positions lead to distinct orientations toward creativity and competition. Another, which is revisited several times, depicts skilled political communication on two dimensions: collaboration versus competition, and ideas versus action. These produce four quadrants whose positions have been articulated by distinctive theorists: exploratory dialogue (Habermas), discursive positioning (Gramsci), reflective problem solving (Dewey), and tactical manoeuver (Machiavelli).

The concept of public is central to the book. However, Mische’s use of the term is quite restricted, as follows: “This book has been concerned with the relationship between parties and ‘publics,’ a term I have used in a restricted sense, to describe heterogeneous forums for crosssectoral communication that depend on the provisional suppression of some aspects of participants identities and projects” (p. 343). Despite this narrow definition, much of the book is about civil society in Brazil, or at least the

segments that overlap with youth activism, and thus the work should be of value to a relatively wide audience.

This is a book that should be of great interest to social movement scholars, and political sociologists. It covers a number of understudied topics in the social movements literature, including leaders, culture, and communication. One strength of the book is that it attempts to address dynamics of changes over time (e.g., issues such as coalition formation and reformation). From the perspective of university teaching this would be a good book to assign to a graduate course in social movements or political sociology. Sections of the book would also be of interest to those teaching graduate courses in social network analysis, or theory.

Social network scholars who have an interest in qualitative methods, and with nontraditional techniques such as the use of Gallois Lattices will find this book to be very instructive. As a social networks and social movements scholar myself, I found Mische's qualitative analyses particularly enlightening and refreshing as most social network analyses these days focus primarily on abstract measures of graph theoretic properties and probabilities about the formation of ties between particular sets of nodes. Her work answers Doug McAdam's call for more qualitative research on the mechanisms that underlie the relationship between networks and social movement participation. Mische utilizes more formal methods (such as Gallois Lattices) to depict the relationships between particular actors and multiple organizations, but then uses ethnography to explain the patterns, and their implications. For those who are interested in social movements and social networks this material is really exemplary.

In sum this book is a valuable addition to the social movements literature, as well as several allied literatures. It may require several readings to fully appreciate its theoretical insights and contributions, however.

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