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# SYMBOLIC OBJECTS IN CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

Benjamin Abrams and Peter Gardner, Editors

When we observe protest marches, striking workers at pickets, and insurgent movements in the world today, a litany of objects routinely fill our field of vision. Some such objects are ubiquitous the world over, such as flags, banners, and placards. Others are situationally unique: who could have anticipated the historical importance of a flower placed in the barrel of a gun, a flaming torch, a sea of umbrellas, a motorist's yellow vest, a feather headdress, an AK-47, or a knitted pink hat? This book explores the "stuff" at the heart of protests, revolutions, civil wars, and other contentious political events. In particular, its focus is on those objects that have or acquire symbolic importance. In the context of "contentious politics" (i.e. disruptive political episodes where people try to change societies without going through institutions), such objects can divide and unite social groups, tell stories, make declarations, spark controversy, and even trigger violent upheavals.

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This book draws together scholars from a variety of fields to discuss symbolic objects in contentious politics: their meanings, uses, functions, and social responses. Its purpose in doing so is threefold. The authors believe that: (1) objects and materiality have been underrepresented and under-theorized in the study of contentious politics broadly defined; (2) various individual subfields—such as social movement studies, peace and conflict studies, and scholarship on revolutions, terrorism, and (counter)insurgency—could gain much from further consideration of symbolic objects; and (3) there is much to be gained from having these subfields in conversation on the topic. In bringing these phenomena together, this book offers a serious, distinctive, and cohesive theoretical contribution, which draws upon diverse scholarly work in order to form the building blocks for future inquiry in the field. The aim of this book is not merely to "close the gap" in the literature, but to create space in the field for further and more fruitful inquiry.

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