

This dimension, however, does not exhaust the significance of collective action. Contemporary collective action weaves together its different roots in multiple meanings, legacies from the past, the effects of modernization, resistances to change. The complexity, the irreducibility, the intricate semantics of the meaning of social action is perhaps the most fundamental theme of this book. Only a society that is able to accommodate the thrust of the movements by providing an unconstrained arena for the fundamental issues raised by collective action, as well as democratic channels of representation and decision-making, can ensure that complexity is not ironed out, that differences are not violated. Keeping open the space for difference is a condition for inventing the present – for allowing society to openly address its fundamental dilemmas and for installing in its present constitution a manageable coexistence of its own tensions.

PART I

Theory of collective action