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Abstract: Social movements contain structures of beliefs and values that guide critical action and aid activists' understandings. These are worthy of interrogation, not least because they contain points of articulation with ideational formations found in both mainstream politics and academia. They offer an alternative view of society, economy and polity that is grounded in protagonists' experience and struggle. However, the ideational content of social movements is often obscured by a focus on particular, immediate goals; by their orientation to certain forms of action; and by the mediated, simplified nature of their communication. Additionally, recent social movements display a tendency to coalition action, bringing a diverse set of political understandings in concert on highly specific campaigns.

This conceptual article seeks an approach to identifying the messages within social movements that remains sensitive to their complexity, dynamism and heterogeneity. Through a critique of the concept of 'interpretative frames' as developed in social movement studies, I describe the novel concept 'orientational frame'. In contrast to social movement scholars' tendency to focus on instrumental claim-making by movement organisations, I emphasise deeply held, relatively stable sets of ideas that allow activists to justify contentious political action. Through an engagement with Michael Freeden's morphological approach to understanding ideologies I attempt to draw frame analysis away from the positivistic attempt to delineate general processes into a hermeneutic endeavour more suitable to understanding the richly detailed, context dependent ideas of particular social movements.

Key words: Interpretative frame, ideology, social movement, hermeneutics

Through discursive activity and political protest, social movement activists develop structures of belief that critique the status quo, offer solutions to identified problems and justify political action to achieve change. Commentary found in both mainstream media and some academic analyses tends to oversimplify these belief structures by associating broad social movements with temporary demands or specific forms of protest activity. However, neither demands nor actions can be fully understood without reference to the wider belief structures within which those elements are embedded. This article proposes a reconceptualization of the interpretative framing approach to social movements that enables the complexity of belief structures to come to the fore, and thereby offers the potential to aid understanding of both the ideational contents of particular movements and the processes through which belief structures in movements are constituted by other cultural formations.

The ambition to apply greater attention to the structured beliefs that may operate within movements is prompted by three challenges to social movement theory. First, I assume that movements are animated by participants' critical beliefs and alternative visions of the societies in which they live. But movement actors plan both their actions and their claims strategically, taking into account their understandings of contextual factors such as what aims may be achievable and what resources and political opportunities are available (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Since claims-making is strategic – a fact that has certainly been established by the framing approach – an understanding of any movement requires that we look beyond particular claims and actions to the underlying beliefs about society that motivate them. The identification of such beliefs raises significant epistemological and methodological problems that are addressed below through delineation of the novel concept of an 'orientational frame'. Frames may be 'orientational' in a number of senses: they relate to people's basic beliefs and attitudes; they offer direction since they are inherently action-focused; and they allow actors to understand their own position relative to others.

Second, empirical examination of periods of movement action often uncovers significant diversity in the political worldviews that motivate action. Moreover, contemporary movements have developed a positive evaluation of diversity that rivals traditional calls for unity. This is evident from the Zapatista's slogan 'one no, many yeses'; the Social Forums' opposition to the

'*pensée unique'*, or singular, unified idea; and the stable alliance of the Stop the War Coalition, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Muslim Association of Britain in the British anti-war movement (Gillan *et al.* 2008). Of course, internal diversity is nothing new and CND, for instance, has throughout its 50-year history been noted for a membership that spans a broad political spectrum, with only the policy of unilateral disarmament held in common (Taylor 1988; Byrne 1987). But the empirical fact of internal diversity also raises a theoretical problem – one that was most persuasively set out by Alberto Melucci – of studying movements without presenting them as unified, homogenous forces. That is to say, when a researcher defines a social movement as an object of study they necessarily reify what is, in fact, a set of events and processes that may have competing interpretations. Melucci argues that reification gives the aggregation of individual and collective behaviours an undeserved 'ontological weight and qualitative homogeneity; collective reality, as it were, exists as a unified thing.' As a result, 'the *collective dimension* of social behaviour is taken as a given, as a datum obvious enough to require no further analysis.' (1996: 15) The Meluccian challenge is therefore to analyse social movements without starting from an assumption of unity and raises a complex 'levels of analysis' problem that requires careful consideration.

Third, the framing approach has been criticised for its inability to encompass the impact of political ideologies on movement thought and action (Fisher 1997, Steinberg 1998). While frames and ideologies both relate to structures of ideas, it is clear that ideologies are not isomorphic with either the frames that have been identified in the empirical literature, or with the broader social movements that typically form the empirical referents of social movement scholarship. I will argue that this debate has been relatively unproductive, largely because of the failure to incorporate a sophisticated understanding of the structure of ideologies. I therefore introduce Michael Freeden's 'morphological' approach and outline the ways in which it might inform the analysis of interpretative frames. Taken together, the empirical focus encouraged by the Meluccian challenge and Freeden's morphological conception of belief structures enable the development of a hermeneutic approach to identify the orientational frames found within particular movements. The methodological implications of that approach are set out in the final part of this article.

Interpretive Frames in Social Movements

An overview of the relevant literature defines frames as:

> collective patterns of interpretation with which certain definitions of problems, causal attributions, demands, justifications and value-orientations are brought together in a more or less consistent framework for the purpose of explaining facts, substantiating criticism and legitimating claims. (Rucht and Neidhardt 2002: 11)

This draws our attention to three important elements. First, frames are often conceived of as an entity belonging to the collective level. This raises conceptual difficulties that are explored shortly. Second, frames have a range of content consisting of a structured set of beliefs and values. Content, however, is typically underplayed in favour of the third element of frame analysis; that is, frames are employed strategically by individual or collective agents to fulfil a variety of social movement tasks.

Strategic Framing

The interpretative frame is considered to be a cognitive feature essential to all linguistic representation. However, frames have gained particular attention in relation to social movements because the latter typically make claims about the world and attempt to persuade others of their veracity. Gamson describes the interpretative frame, as particularly found in social movements, as a 'collective action frame', which requires three components: an emotively defined injustice; an analysis of agency; and an identity component defining both the 'we' of interested people, and a 'they' who hold opposing values. (Gamson 1992: 7-8)

The bulk of social movement frame analyses have, in either historical or contemporary context, examined the creation of frames by social movement organisations (SMOs). Here it is the process of framing, rather than the content of the frame, on which analysis is focused (Polletta 1997: 439). The SMO is considered to be a conscious agent of framing; demonstrating varying degrees of skill in manipulating the presentation of particular issues in order to bring bystanders

to their view, make opponents' positions appear illegitimate and ultimately force policy change. Since SMOs need to attract membership, 'social movements cannot exist in the long term without the promotion of convincing movement-specific frames.' (Rucht and Neidhardt 2002: 11) Snow *et al.* (1986) influentially outlined four processes of 'frame alignment': bridging, amplification, extension and transformation. Each involves the reconstruction of collective action frames on the basis of expectations about the effect this would have on the general public. The SMO seeks a degree of fit between the collective action frames they portray and the interpretative frames already used by bystanders to make sense of the world. Through such processes, under certain conditions, SMOs gain wider support.

Snow and Benford extend their work on frame alignment by offering an explanation of how broader social forces interact with individuals' motivations to participate. They attempt to theorise a bridge between micro and macro levels of analysis. They develop the concept of 'master frames', which 'are to movement-specific collective action frames as paradigms are to finely tuned theories.' (Snow and Benford 1992: 138) The explanatory potential of the master frame is laid out in connection with Sidney Tarrow's work on cycles of protest. Snow and Benford suggested that the temporal and geographical clustering of protest events could be explained by the development of a particular master frame developed by 'early riser' movements. The new master frame offers a cultural tool which could subsequently be used in different contexts by different social movements. The strategy here lies in being able to utilise broadly agreed cultural values in order to transcend current practices.

There are two clarifications of the idea of strategic alignment processes that are illustrative, before I examine their conceptual foundations in social psychology. First, groups that do not choose to promote their interpretations with some awareness of bystanders' frames are unlikely to grow, and this is understood by movement activists. Consequently groups that do not engage in frame alignment processes are rare. However, they do exist: participants in some groups may be less interested in gaining support, and more interested in targeting their opponents in a forceful, direct manner. An example would be those animal rights activists who harass and assault individuals involved in vivisection. In such cases, how they are perceived is less important to participants, than the concrete results of their actions. Frame alignment processes

are not, therefore, a ubiquitous feature of social movement activities, merely a common one. Furthermore, because part of the content of a collective action frame is seen to be a conception of agency ('how we can change the world') the content of the frame itself is likely to determine to what degree a movement group aims at frame alignment.

Second, while we might accept that consensus on a collective action frame exists within a particular organisation, this cannot be assumed to be representative of a movement as a whole since movements consist in 'a field of actors, not a unified entity' (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 283-4). The individual bystander may be expected, therefore, to come across a range of collective action frames within a single movement. This is clearly the case with the movements contesting globalisation (Welsh and Chesters 2001). Thus, strategic framing by SMOs is, at best, only part of the story of alignment between movement critiques and individual's understandings. We cannot, therefore, expect examination of strategic framing to give us access to the range of beliefs and values within the movement. To the extent that we are interested in the ideational basis of participation, we therefore need a supplementary or alternative approach.

The Social-Psychological Foundation of Interpretative Frames

The interpretative frame was first defined for application to social movements, using a concept borrowed by Snow et al. from Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis.* They explain that frames are: '"schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large' (Snow *et al*. 1986: 464; quoting Goffman 1974). The language of 'schemata' remains central to understanding cognition in social psychology where knowledge structures are recognised as helping actors decide on appropriate behaviour in novel situations. Schemata cover myriad topics from the stereotyping of ethnic minorities to the mundane activities of our everyday lives (Baron and Byrne 2003: 80-82). The interpretative frame built on this literature is, therefore, presented as a cognitive shortcut utilised by the individual to order their perceptions of the world (Johnston 1995: 235-7). Rather than understanding an object or event through reconstruction from its component parts, we actually assign a satisfactory definition to a complex whole that, in turn, enables us to understand the

component parts as having an identifiable meaning; 'perceptive data are 'grouped' together under the heading of one subsuming category, a larger 'frame' which provides them with a recognizable structure and meaning.' (Donati 1992: 140-1)

At the individual psychological level, however, the interpretative frame is epistemologically and methodologically troublesome. An individual interpretative frame (schema) is, by definition, privy only to the individual. Even for them the effects are indirect, rather than resulting from conscious knowledge. One cannot become, as it were, part of that individual to learn the frame as one can (with some methodological caveats) become part of an organisation that utilises a collective action frame. The individual interpretative frame is unknowable because at any time some parts are latent and others prominent. Scheff notes a common misunderstanding of Goffman's work, 'The difficulty of measuring latent frames could partially explain the gradual theoretical shift toward a conceptualization of frames as being more actively adopted and manufactured' (Scheff 2005). While not explicitly directed towards social movement theory this quotation clearly points out the direction such scholarship has taken. The active process of strategic framing is relatively easy to perceive as it is momentarily ossified in movements' textual artefacts. Yet here we only perceive those aspects of the frame that are, for particular purposes, intentionally put to the fore. While this is valuable data we must reject the notion that it accurately reflects the full set of beliefs of either individuals or groups.

The ambition of much framing scholarship is to delineate important processes that mediate predictably between political culture, SMOs and individual behaviour. Since frames are identified at the collective level but conceived as causally effective at the individual level such work introduces a problematic dualism. This highlights confusion over agency. The issues framed by an SMO are effective if they appeal to belief structures already held by a set of bystanders. Notions of frame alignment assume a limited level of agency for the bystander who is seen as assimilating frames available within the wider culture. Simultaneously, members of SMOs ('adherents') choose to present their issues in particular ways, assuming a wide degree of control over their collective action frames. At some point the bystander becomes an adherent and, on this model, will gain control over their own framing. This problem highlights the deficiency of the bystander-adherent distinction which ignores the many shades of grey that may

colour an individual's 'membership' of a movement. Further, we should question to what degree *any* movement participants have the ability to control their own interpretative framing on the issues that motivate their action. If framing has a social-psychological foundation then what is true for the movement bystander is also true for the SMO adherent. That is to say, if frames are considered to be causally effective at all then it is because they organise understanding in a way that makes some paths of action seem rational or morally imperative. So, while it is clear that the presentation of ideas may be manipulated, within some broad limits of credibility, in seeking to understand the beliefs and values that motivate action we need to look beyond the presentation of ideas, to the subjective commitment to beliefs: 'Frames are not objects or utensils in the objective world, which agents can pick up and use like tools. They are constitutive aspects of the subjectivity of social agents' (Crossley 2002: 141).

This difficulty also sharpens the ongoing tension in the framing literature between conceiving of frames as characteristic of either collective-linguistic or individual-cognitive processes. While academics oriented to more psychological analyses tend to emphasise the cognitive (Johnston 1995), David Snow and colleagues tend to present frames as linguistic: 'neither frames nor framing processes are purely or merely mentalistic or cognitive entities. Instead, they are rooted in and constituted by group-based social interaction, which is readily available for first-hand observation' (Snow & Benford 2000: 57). Yet descriptions of the causal efficacy of framing tend to fall back on a notion of meaning that, at least implicitly, is located in the individual's mind: 'Since our actions depend in part on the meanings attached to our objects of orientation, differences in imputed meanings can yield differences in action, *ceteris paribus*' (Snow 2004: 404). While Snow's constructivist approach allows for the collective construction of meaning, it is unclear how a collective construct can influence behaviour without also operating at the individual, cognitive level. Of course, the linguistic and cognitive interpretations are difficult to tease apart, partly because any evidence for the specificities of individual cognition that we can gather is always indirect, dependent on a situation that is social and linguistic. But, as I will argue below, this does not necessarily mean we should abandon the notion that at the root of collective action is individual cognition. That is to say, as social movement scholarship has long accepted that movement participants are reflective beings with reasoned motivations for action, then collective action emerges from the patterning of individual choice. It is the attempt to

interpret that patterning – to identify why certain interpretative frames can lead to certain kinds of activity and outcome – that gives the framing approach its most persuasive appeal.

Defining the Orientational Frame 1: Centring the Idea

The preceding points suggest that while claiming to bring the realm of beliefs and values into a theory of social movements criticised for its ignorance of culture, the focus on processes of framing has pushed the ideas themselves to the periphery of that approach. Perhaps, to 'talk about how frames or ideologies relate to other features of social life, it is necessary to make the verbs of process in to nouns of ideas' (Oliver and Johnston 2000b: 62). I will shortly suggest that this distinction between process and ideas as verbs and nouns is too sharp, but first it is necessary to expand the argument that the contents of interpretative frames found in movements should be of central concern.

As outlined in the introduction, identifying the content of ideas is a route to characterising the significance of the social movement that carries them. This is because what we are examining are political, as well as sociological, phenomena. Movements offer reflections on the organisation of social, political and economic life which are of value to all those for whom a normative appraisal of current political and social structures is necessary. Further justifications for the importance of ideational content hang on the potential to increase our sensitivity to the precise messages within any movement, and thereby recognise potential heterogeneity. From a public policy angle it is now necessary to accept the social movement as an institution of social change or defence (Nathanson 2003). The organisations of 'global civil society' have turned increasingly to social movement activities; for instance, Oxfam, CAFOD and Christian Aid have all been active in anti-globalisation protests. But the multi-vocal nature of social movements makes it difficult to predict reactions to policy innovation and implementation. Furthermore, frame analysis has already been taken into a range of substantive policy areas such as public heath, education, management and international relations (Lawrence 2004; Davies 2002; Creed et al. 2002; Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002). In these fields advocacy is seen to take place in a form that is

analogous to social movement contention and, again, in these areas it is important to delineate precisely the claims being made when a movement acts.

It is, of course, hardly novel to prioritise the generation of critical ideas in the definition of social movements. Eyerman and Jamison, for instance, see social movements as the well-spring of new ideas in society through their often experimental 'cognitive praxis'. Cognitive praxis – collective efforts to reconceive society – provides 'the core identity of a social movement', which allows the scholar to identify the boundaries of a movement and to 'evaluate the current status and potential of actual movements' (1991: 44). With a quite different methodological approach, Thomas Rochon also examines particular values – 'such as the belief that "separate but equal" is an unjust vision of race relations, or that maintenance of biodiversity is essential for human survival' (1998: 48) – in order to evaluate their impact on wider society. It may be significant that neither Rochon nor Eyerman and Jamison utilise any sustained engagement with the framing approach in their analyses: both studies seek to outline the role of movements in wider culture, whereas the framing approach has typically examined the role of culture within social movements. Seeing the production of ideas as the purpose of social movements, and not merely a strategic aspect of movement behaviour, Rochon and Eyerman and Jamison seek to identify and describe the particular ideas of particular movements.

It is, however, precisely because the framing approach has developed sensitivity to the cultural processes in social movements in connection with other significant structures that we should seek to understand structures of belief within the broader rubric of framing. But the methodological and conceptual critiques of the framing approach set out above suggest that substantial reconceptualisation is required to enable the interpretation of the ideational content. It is for this reason that the remainder of this paper 'reframes' the notion of framing, using the label 'orientational frames' to distinguish it from other concepts within the approach.

Orientational Frames and Levels of Analysis

The orientational frame is proposed as an analytical construct and should, therefore, simplify the 'really existing' beliefs and values to which individuals subscribe. Within an interpretative process the orientational frame is useful to the extent that it makes sense of the proclamations and behaviour of individual and collective actors. How to find analytical purchase in the stew of ideas available within movements is described in the following sections.

By describing the orientational frame as an analytical abstraction from various individual beliefs I am attempting to move away from the tendency to describe the 'shared' beliefs of some collection of individuals (and thus the term 'collective action frame' itself). This point requires some clarification. In describing the ideas an individual may hold in a way that offers analytical value there are two options. First, one might shift attention from the individuals' thoughts to the 'thoughts' of the groups to which they belong. This is usually described as a change in levels of analysis. Secondly, we might shift attention from particular representations to discover implied meanings and connections, tensions and contradictions that lay behind the specific articulations.

The first approach is that usually taken around the concept of collective action frames. These are intended to convey the ideas that all members of a group agree upon and data is found within the position papers and policies agreed by the group. In short, the collective action frame takes us from the individual (micro) level of analysis to the collective (meso) level. As explained above, this is not in keeping with the conceptual origins of interpretative frames. It can only be based on the notion that members of the group all share a particular set of ideas on a particular set of topics. This generally leads the researcher to a very specific set of ideas, expressed in the language used by the particular SMO under study. However, any assumed link between the projected beliefs of an SMO and the actual beliefs of individual members is problematic. In a representational structure of decision-making, for instance, many participants may disagree with the statements made by an organisation while continuing to support that organisation because they accept the process by which such statements were decided. In any case, as suggested throughout, much collective action is characterised by ideational diversity. The individual-collective link, while it may hold for small organisations, is only likely to hinder understanding within broad-based movements.

The second approach to finding analytical purchase in empirical information about individuals' beliefs is via analytical abstraction. Here we must give up the attempt to describe an idea-set that a collective of individuals will whole-heartedly agree to. Our abstraction must, nevertheless, be connected to the real world of activists' beliefs and values. That is to say: the component parts of the orientational frame must all appear in activist discourse. Since it is the structure of ideas that give particular elements their meaning, the component parts of the orientational frame really encompass the connections between ideas rather than particular beliefs about the world or particular moral values. Further, individuals may use multiple signifiers to convey the same meaning; or the same words and phrases to convey multiple significations. Consequently, systematic interpretation is required, utilising an empirical base found in speech, texts or practices produced by a variety of activists. The analytical processes of abstraction is an attempt to corral this herd of ideas into a simplified structure; some ideas can be penned together in a way that makes sense of movement activity and discourse while others refuse to submit. It is through this process that we begin to find the boundaries of an orientational frame: boundaries appear where the connections between elements become less referential or reinforcing and more distant or divisive. Shortly, I will outline a particular hermeneutic methodology appropriate for this task; first, however, it will be profitable to identify the ontological status of the orientational frame, and then examine the relationship between frames and ideologies.

The Orientational Frame as Cultural Product

An 'orientational frame' identifies a worldview that may be utilised by social movement participants to create understanding of significant events and processes of which they are aware, to justify particular responses to them and to envision alternative arrangements. It may consist in a range of subjects of belief, including: political processes; moral values; visions for long-term change; the agency of the individual or the group; and the relationship of other social actors to different sets of ideas. Maintaining one of the fundamental insights of frame analysis, we can envision a structure of ideational elements, wherein each element gains its specific meaning from its connection with other elements as well from the context in which it is used.

As a structure of ideas, identified through abstraction from evidence about individuals' beliefs, the frame may gain ontological weight as a distinct cultural product. For instance, when particular arguments are convincingly (or simply repeatedly) portrayed together through discussion then their coherence is repeatedly asserted; or when they are acted upon then their potential as a justification for action is made public. We might reasonably expect that this generates some momentum for structured sets of beliefs that become more accessible the more they are publicly utilised. As Polletta insists, culture is both patterned and patterning (1999: 66-7).

Empirical identification of orientational frames may be utilised as a unit of analysis: rather than seeking to identify a set of ideas to which a particular social movement (or SMO) adheres, one seeks the frames evidenced in a period of collective action. It is probable both that any particular movement may contain many orientational frames and that particular frames may persist across movements. This should help counter the negative affect that Benford (1997) attributes to a 'descriptive bias' in framing literature, namely that it has created static tendencies in conceptualisation of frames through content rather than process. However, this problem is not rooted in description itself, but in the fact that descriptions are frequently limited to individual SMOs or campaigns. Alternatively, examination of recent anti-war activism in the UK reveals that rather than a single frame being operational within that period of contention, multiple frames helped protagonists comprehend the 'War on Terror' and justify particular reactions to it (Gillan et al. 2008). Some of those frames had clearly developed out of contention around neoliberal globalisation, and were modified in the face of militarist state action (Gillan 2006: ch. 7). By conceptualising the frame as a cultural product, connected to specific periods of contention but nevertheless independent of the particular groups that mobilise protest, we open the possibility for a genuinely dynamic vision of frames. Comparison of frames in different contexts enables analysis of the ways in which events, processes and other ideas may impact on ideational content and, therefore, the beliefs and values available to movement participants. As an analytical tool the orientational frame thereby offers potential in overcoming both the Meluccian challenge and the overdrawn distinction between the 'noun of ideas' and the 'verbs of process'.

Defining the Orientational Frame 2: Between Frames and Ideologies

Snow and colleagues use the terms 'frame' and 'ideology' almost interchangeably and develop their description of three key framing tasks (diagnosis, prognosis and motivation) from Wilson's (1973) decomposition of ideology. Consequently, they have been criticised for failing to distinguish coherently between frames and ideologies (Fisher 1997, Steinberg 1998). However, the debate has been relatively unproductive; Snow's most recent contribution, for instance, simply asserts that ideologies are variable phenomena and that the relationship between ideologies and collective action frames requires empirical study (Snow 2004: 399).

Making use of Michael Freeden's (1996) morphological approach to ideology I will argue that the conception of 'orientational frames' outlined above helps to mediate between specific activist frames and more general ideologies. Beforehand, it is necessary to briefly consider two more traditional perspectives on ideology. First, ideologies are often viewed critically; that this is central to conceptions of ideology is witnessed by the encyclopaedic definition as: 'a collection of beliefs and values held by an individual or group *for other than purely epistemic reasons'* (Railton 1995: 392-3, italics added). Larrain extensively charts developments in the concept and demonstrates multiple pejorative approaches that share the view of ideology as an aberration from rational thought (1979: ch. 6). For present purposes it is unnecessary to tease apart these conceptions, but it is noteworthy that Oliver and Johnston's argument for bringing ideological concepts into frame analysis appeals specifically for a non-pejorative conceptualisation (2000a: 39). While academics may produce critiques of specified aspects of social movement thinking it seems clear that beginning an analysis by denying the intellectual value of activists' ideas is hardly conducive to understanding the messages of movements.

A second perspective on ideologies, and one which was prevalent in approaches to social movements in the 1950s and 1960s, may initially appear more useful. Here ideologies are understood as, 'idea complexes containing beliefs … which support or contest political arrangements and processes, as well as providing plans of action ... they act as devices for mobilizing mass political activity' (Freeden 1996: 16). This conception has been utilised in order to bring a positivist stance to the project of cataloguing and classification of various ideological

traditions. But Snow and Benford rightly reject the utility of that conception of ideology, since in application to social movements ideology was conceived as 'highly descriptive and relatively static … Moreover, how it comes into existence and is appropriated by movement actors has been taken as given' (Snow and Benford 2000: 56).

More appealing, therefore, is a third conception of ideology. Michael Freeden's approach is 'morphological'; that is, the analysis of ideologies is directed at the structures of ideas that produce meaning, and therefore mirrors the approach to orientational frames set out above. Freeden seeks a balanced ontological and epistemological position:

> ideologies are distinct thought-products that invite careful investigation in their own right… it is vital to recognize that in studying ideologies we are directing our analyses at actual arrangements of political thinking…. we should try to represent and discuss the features of ideologies that can be shown to exist. We need to do so while remembering also … not to neglect their wealth of detail, intricacy of structure, and complexity of argument. (1996: 23)

Freeden describes ideologies as 'ubiquitous forms of political thinking' that are 'produced by, directed at, and consumed by groups' serving functions of 'legitimation, integration, socialization, ordering, simplification and action-orientation' (1996: 22-3). Yet the category of ideology (significantly singular) is, rather, a construct through which the analyst seeks to interpret belief structures. Theorists debating 'the generic term 'ideology' are largely conducting a debate about a particular perspective on the social and political world.' (ibid.: 22) Rather than imbuing the category of ideology with reality through inclusion in predictive-explanatory models, particular ideologies need to be explored in depth because they are interesting and valuable in themselves.

It should be clear that the combination of the definitional features of ideologies and Freeden's focus on the actual contents of belief structures has influenced my depiction of orientational frames above. Indeed, the linkage between the concepts may appear so close as to make latter redundant. However, there is a difference in scale between the ideologies that Freeden examines and the orientational frames we can identify within activists' ideas. Orientational frames and ideologies lie within the same family of phenomena: they are patterns of political ideas that are

pieced together by actors in a manner that produces particular kinds of meaning, and makes purposive action possible (Freeden 1996: 45-6). Yet differences of degree exist on several dimensions.

We can differentiate orientational frames from ideologies on three particular dimensions. First, the orientational frame is conceived to make sense of thought in social movements and we would therefore expect particular frames to say something about the nature of action required for social change. Social movements are partly defined by their engagement in non-institutional forms of political action. Movement actors must, therefore, make use of belief-structures that critique existing political institutions and see a potential for collective agency that lies outside of those institutions. Recognition of the deeply interrelated nature of a movement's political content and its preferences for action offers rich potential in interpreting social movement activities. Tactical choices convey political beliefs and values (McAdam 1996). Since purposive action in protest is related to activists' conceptions of agency and power, as developed in moments of struggle, we should expect orientational frames to signal quite different action orientations to those found in ideologies. Moreover, political beliefs are likely to be debated in reference to tactics for change since the primary purpose of interaction within social movements is often to find methods to create change. Freeden does, at times, stress the action-oriented nature of ideological thinking (1996: 105). Nevertheless, what he is interested in throughout, that is, what he substantively studies, are almost exclusively written texts. Because orientational frames are conceived to encompass practices as well as text, they offer potential to perceive the particular kinds of action-orientation associated with social movements.

The second dimension of difference between ideologies and orientational frames relates to the creation of new ideas. Oliver and Johnson see ideological production as an elite activity where, in time, '"The masses" come to adopt systematic ideologies through processes of education and socialization' (2000a: 48). It is true that intellectuals may provide ideological leadership to social movements, as was the case for instance, with EP Thompson and the British New Left (Kenny 1995). Yet to begin with an assumption that ideological production is removed from 'the masses' must surely be mistaken in any endeavour that seeks to understand the use of ideas within social movements. Freeden's own work claims to balance these perspectives. Yet while he undoubtedly

pays attention to social and political context he nevertheless ties his investigation to great works of notable individuals and he admits that in another context 'the investigation of ideologies ought to examine mass, or at least large-scale, social thinking' (1996: 106). The social movement scholars' approach to interpretative frames offers potential for carrying out such work. However, the collective action frame typically identifies temporary, campaign-specific beliefs and, problematically, carries the assumption that these are instrumentally variable rather than deeply held political values. The orientational frame offers a mid-range concept with which it becomes possible to identify the development of the political ideas that motivate movement action yet remains firmly embedded in the praxis of the grassroots.

A third dimension of difference relates to the closure, or certainty, of beliefs in ideologies and frames. For Freeden, ideological thinking is defined by 'the fundamental structural feature of ideologies: the conclusiveness of decontestation … the attempt to control equivocal and contingent meaning by fixing it and by blocking off alternative meanings' (2008: 2). It is not clear, however, that this is always so strongly the case in the creation and maintenance of orientational frames. While frames may describe the belief structures adhered to by individuals, the ingredients from which they are created are often provided in collective situations within which structures of authority are quite loose. In the crowded public meeting, or fraught tactical debate, a wide range of ideas may be made available. Such situations may be as conducive to the creation of belief structures through the accumulation of ideas that are more or less in tension, as they are to the weighing of different possibilities and rejection of ideas that introduce uncertainty. Again, the particular context of ideological production differs significantly from that of ideational work in social movements and we might thereby perceive a structural difference in resultant content.

Together, these three dimensions of difference suggest that the arenas in which belief-structures are produced may result in differences in content and structure. Ideologies point to the result of longer-term processes of reflection, less intent on justifying extra-institutional political action and more inclined to seek fixity of meaning. It seems likely that under these conditions ideologies will tend to be broader in scope and potentially longer in duration than the frames created by activists, and may, as Zald (1996) suggests, contain many of the ingredients of

specific frames. However, to what extent actual ideologies and actual orientational frames confirm these expectations is an empirical matter. More usefully, the theoretical proposals described above give some strong indications about how we could confirm the connections between ideologies and frames. Because ideologies and frames are both perceived to be belief structures whose meaning is created by the interrelation of ideational elements, it would require the presence of a number of interrelated ideas in a similar formation in both a frame and an ideology to suggest a connection. Once both frame and ideology are identified through analysis of the appropriate empirical referents, a 'mapping' of the content of one onto the other will demonstrate a meaningful connection. The boundaries of frames may be more porous than those of ideologies, but we should nevertheless expect some interplay in both directions – both are, after all, cultural products that aid the interpretation of social and political phenomena.

A Hermeneutic Approach to Orientational Frames

The preceding sections delineate the orientational frame as an analytical device to direct the researcher to a particular level of analysis when examining the belief structures utilised by movement actors. Particular orientational frames are discoverable through abstraction of ideational elements from the concrete expressions of political ideas found in activists' speech, actions and textual artefacts. In previous work I have identified orientational frames through an ethnographic methodology comprised of participant observation, interviews and documentary analysis (Gillan 2006). But a variety of data gathering techniques may justifiably be utilised to construct an empirical dataset for analysis; this article does not seek to promote any particular one. Nevertheless, for the concept of orientational frames to be useful it is important to consider the mode of interpretation required to move from empirical data to analytical abstraction. This section therefore examines the role of hermeneutic interpretation in relation to orientational frames.

For present purposes we can understand hermeneutics as the development of a critique of positivist social science that targets attempts to ape the natural sciences in both methodology and theory construction. Centrally, hermeneuticists claim that the need to interpret human meaning starkly differentiates understanding human behaviour from explaining the phenomena of the

natural world. Where human behaviour may be objectively and empirically observable, the meaning that actors attach to their behaviour can only be interpreted. Interpretation is defined as, 'an attempt to make clear, to make sense of.... a text or text-analogue, which is in some way confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory.... The interpretation aims to bring to light an underlying coherence or sense.' (Taylor 1971: 15) Of course, wherever we seek meaning it will be confused, incomplete and cloudy since meaning and language are inextricably interwoven (Winch 1958: 40-4). Moreover, the political concepts that comprise particular orientational frames are likely to be heavily contested, carrying multiple alternative meanings. It is only once those concepts are situated in a patterned belief structure that they take on definite meanings; in Freeden's terms, the ideational elements are decontested through their relationship to other ideas.

The orientational frame may be considered a whole, of which many interrelating ideas and the connections between them form the parts. The hermeneutic circle is an interpretative process precisely directed to clarifying meaning in a situation where parts and whole are co-dependent in this way:

> We face the dilemma: how can we know the parts without already knowing the whole context and, conversely, how can we grasp the whole without prior knowledge of the parts? This circularity is gradually and partially overcome by working backward and forward between the wider context and the particular text or action in question, building up an interpretation in layers since not everything can be understood at once… Movement between the part and the whole necessarily involves understanding phenomena in their intellectual, social and historical context. (Oliver 1983: 527-8)

Thus, the identification of orientational frames requires, firstly, an iterative process wherein the ideational elements themselves are continually reinterpreted as understanding of the larger structure of ideas is improved. Secondly, the process requires a broad exploration of context, a point I will return to shortly.

Within the process of interpretation, 'There are no final truth claims … since understanding is always part of a hermeneutic circle – a process of criss-crossing horizons mutually affecting each other and never converging in a final objective viewpoint' (Tate 1998: 14). This introduces a

second dimension to the hermeneutic circle. On one hand, interpretation circles between the parts and whole of the research subject; on the other it circles between the analysts' interpretations and those of other interpreters. Thus, hermeneutics highlights the tentativeness of understanding. Despite the denial of permanent truth claims the hermeneutic circle halts the slide into the meaninglessness of absolute relativism. It asserts that the 'conversations' between text and interpreter, between author and interpreter, and between rival interpretations offer progress towards a better understanding of really existing social processes. That this understanding does not resemble the mode of explanation claimed by the natural sciences is to be expected, since hermeneutics is grounded on the distinction between the subjects of the human and natural sciences. Furthermore, 'The "hermeneutic circle" … is no more damaging for the empirical credentials of interpretative sociology than the corresponding circularity of theory and theory-laden observations in natural science.' (Little 1995) This is because it contains a repeatable and coherent approach to understanding, and because the process 'makes conscious the prejudices governing our own understanding, so that a more balanced evaluation of a text becomes possible.' (Freeden 1996: 115)

Hermeneutics has been criticised for its lack of clear, practical methodological guidelines (Hamel 1998). Indeed, hermeneutics offers a philosophically based approach rather than a particular set of techniques for research. Nevertheless, some methodological tendencies encouraged by a hermeneutic perspective are discernible and Prasad (2002: 24-6) offers some suggestive comments that help to fill out the approach. First, the notion of a 'text' for interpretation is understood very widely, encompassing human action in general. This is particularly valuable for the investigation of orientational frames since, as argued above, forms of political action should be considered as meaningful data, which fits well with recent attempts to theorise the performative aspects of contention (Eyerman 2006). Second, context may be defined at different levels of comprehensiveness and may be considered either synchronically or diachronically. In examining an orientational frame the specific political culture within which the protagonists are situated forms both synchronic and diachronic context. The history of geographically or topically similar social movements; the attitudes to key issues by non-movement actors such as government and media; the rival understandings of key movement events; and the literature read by those within the movement are all likely to be useful sources in

locating the frame within the relevant context. Travelling the hermeneutic circle will take the analyst repeatedly from the broader political culture to the specific ideational elements found in primary data and back again; at each stage, coherence is improved. Third, analyses often begin at the level of most specificity, and move towards a more general level. This directs us to begin with movement actors' articulations of beliefs; a useful starting point because such articulations may well direct the researcher to those aspects of political culture that are most directly relevant. Fourth, because hermeneutics does not seek to understand the authors' intentions, but rather a deeper, more holistic meaning, such analysis is eminently suitable for texts with many identifiable authors or none. Since the identification of orientational frames seeks to abstract from individual (or organisational) utterances, this is one further useful aspect of the hermeneutic process.

Conclusions

Activists' beliefs may appear to place them outside of the mainstream of political thought, yet they engage concretely with essential political concepts such as democracy, power and agency as well as the particular political contests of the day. Social movements thereby represent ideas in motion. That such ideas cannot be simply read off press releases or placards should not be a barrier to researchers' attempts to give them serious consideration. The argument of this article may be construed in two directions. First, it attempts to demonstrate the value of political theory in understanding social movements and is therefore an appeal to social movement scholars to take seriously the realm of ideologies. In doing so, the importance of understanding the political content of social movements is portrayed. Thus, this article might, secondly, be construed as an appeal to scholars of political ideologies to take social movements more seriously as both a source of ideas and as a concrete representation of political beliefs in practice.

Movement practices tend to encourage the simplification of ideas to temporally specific demands and resonant slogans. However, protagonists can only make sense of and justify their own actions when these are set within wider ideational complexes. The concept 'orientational frame' aims to capture those wider belief structures. Three different bodies of theory all begin from the

position that meaning comes from the location of ideational elements within constellations of ideas. First, the framing approach in social movement scholarship began by borrowing this insight, but has tended to focus on the processes of strategic framing rather than the belief structures that inform activists' understandings of the political world. Second, Freeden's morphological approach to ideologies focuses specifically on the interconnections between ideas by which political concepts are decontested. Such ideologies tend to have a greater weight and tradition than the frames utilised by activists, since they have been subject to extended philosophical development over many years. By contrast, activists utilise ideas from the broader political culture to understand the changing present. Third, hermeneutics uses the same insight concerning the construction of meaning in order to outline a systematic approach to increasing understanding in the social sciences. By bringing these three bodies of theory together this article offers a conceptually consistent approach to analysing that aspect of social movements that is so often obscured: its fundamental basis in political beliefs and values.

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