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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

AN INTRODUCTION

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1989, 1991; Benford and Hunt 1992; Hunt and Benford 1994; Benford 1993). Some observers have come to equate movements with a form of drama “in which the protagonists and antagonists compete to affect audiences’ interpretations of power relations in a variety of domains” (Benford and Hunt 1992: 38; see also Melucci 1984b, 1989; Sassoon 1984a, 1984b; Gusfield 1994; Rupp and Taylor 2003). One does not need, however, to accept all the theoretical implications of this argument to recognize that social movement activity largely consists of practices more or less directly linked to symbolic production; and that this element is not a precondition for conflict but, rather, one of its constituent parts.

3.2.2 Interpretative frames and ideology

Among scholars interested in symbolic aspects of collective action, the notion of the schema of interpretation, or frame, borrowed from the theoretical work of Erving Goffman (1974) has proved very influential. Frames have been defined as 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). A frame thus “is a general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver’s knowledge of the world) which allows recognition of the world, and guides perception . . . allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen, that is to make sense of his/her reality” (Donati 1992: 141–2; see also Johnston 1991a, 1991b, 1995a, 2002).

Frame analysis allows us to capture the process of the attribution of meaning which lies behind the explosion of any conflict. In fact, symbolic production enables us to attribute to events and behaviors, of individuals or groups, a meaning which facilitates the activation of mobilization. There are three stages to this process, corresponding to the recognition of certain occurrences as social problems, of possible strategies which would resolve these, and of motivations for acting on this knowledge. Snow and Benford (1988) define these steps as the “diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational” dimension of framing. We shall illustrate them drawing mainly from documents presented at various meetings of the World and the European Social Forum in the last few years.

Diagnostic element

In the first place, appropriate interpretative frames allow the conversion into a social problem, potentially the object of collective action, of a phenomenon whose origins were previously attributed to natural factors or to individual responsibility (Melucci 1989, 1991; Snow et al. 1986). Social problems do in fact exist only to the extent that certain phenomena are interpreted as such by people.

Problems emerge, grow, and disappear, only to reemerge periodically, transformed to a greater or lesser extent (Blumer 1971; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Best 1989; Gusfield 1963, 1981; Downs 1972; Rubington and Weinberg 2003).

Diagnosing a problem always entails identifying the actors who are entitled to have opinions on it. This is always a highly contentious process. Various social actors (state agencies, political parties, groups with hostile interests, media operators) try to affirm their own control of specific issues, imposing their own interpretation of these, to the detriment of representations proposed by social movements. Therefore, the latter must, in the first place, claim the legitimacy to deal with particular problems in ways compatible with their own broader orientations (Gusfield 1989; Shemtov 1999). It is through symbolic conflict that certain actors succeed in being recognized as entitled to speak in the name of certain interests and tendencies. In the case of mobilizations on global issues, interpretations of the conflict have stressed the extreme heterogeneity of the actors involved in such campaigns, implicitly suggesting their entitlement to speak on behalf of the human kind: “Social forces from around the world have gathered here at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. Unions and NGOs, movements and organizations, intellectuals and artists . . . women and men, farmers, workers, unemployed, professionals, students, blacks and indigenous peoples, coming from the South and from the North” (from the preparatory document of the First World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, January 2001; cited in Andretta 2003).

Another crucial step in the social construction of a problem consists of the identification of those responsible for the situation in which the aggrieved population finds itself. For the unemployed as well as for members of marginal groups, a powerful restraint to mobilization is the widespread belief that poverty depends upon individual failure (see for instance Gaventa 1982; Maurer 2001). In fact:

the heat of moral judgment is intimately related to beliefs about what acts or conditions have caused people to suffer undeserved hardship or loss. The critical dimension is the abstractness of the target . . . When we see impersonal, abstract forces as responsible for our suffering, we are taught to accept what cannot be changed and make the best of it . . . At the other extreme, if one attributes undeserved suffering to malicious or selfish acts by clearly identifiable groups, the emotional component of an injustice frame will almost certainly be there.

(Gamson 1992b: 32)

Again from the Porto Alegre documents emerges a clear attribution of responsibility: “the neoliberal globalization, promoted, reinforced and defended by a set of IGOs (WTO, WB, IMF, NATO and so on), by a hegemonic super potency (USA), and by dominant social groups (multinational corporations) . . .

According to the first WSF document, the grievances imputed to neoliberal globalization are several: “from the exploitation of workers in conditions of union rights weakness to poverty, to gender, racial and ethnic discrimination, from environmental diseases to the lack of migrant rights and so on” (cited in Andretta 2003).

The recent transnational movements are a good example of the selective nature of interpretative frames. For the most part, they have adopted a frame which reduced a series of disparate social phenomena to a dominant theme, neoliberal globalization. Thus, phenomena which might initially have been thought diverse have been incorporated into the same interpretative frame. Other frames might have been devised. For example, if North–South tensions had been represented through an anticapitalist frame only, this would not have made alliances to moderate middle-class sectors, concerned with ethical questions, so easy. Each of the frames summarized earlier accounts for specific interpretations, as plausible as the other. But none of them would have worked so well.

On the other hand, opponents of antiglobalization movements have attempted to deny the existence of the “globalization question” – for example, by emphasizing the positive consequences of the liberalization of markets. They have pointed at the growth of overall income and welfare in developing countries; the statistics suggesting that the market share of developing countries is higher than before; the rise of people above the poverty level; the growth of a prosperous middle class. Apart from denying the issue, they have also attempted to reverse the responsibility: economic deprivation is the product of corrupt national governments whose policies will remain disastrous until they are not exposed to close scrutiny from international institutions such as WTO or IMF; moreover, by calling for protectionist measures, “no-global” protestors are actually helping strong corporate powers in the North (both business and unions) by denying poor countries the chance to compete on the global market – a charge which no-global activists happily refute (see also Haydu 1999, Einwohner 2002, for other examples of counterframing by movement opponents).

The identification of social problems and those responsible for them is, inevitably, highly selective. The highlighting of one particular problem leads to the neglect of other potential sources of protest or mobilization which appear not to fit the interpretation of reality adopted. For example, for a long time, the preeminence within Western society of representations of conflict according to a functional/class or national dimension has made the identification of other sources of conflict – such as gender differences – very difficult. Cultural development places actors in the position of being able to choose, from among various possible sources of frustration and revenge, those against which they should direct all their energies, not to mention their emotional identification. The process can, in this sense, be seen as a reduction of social complexity. At the same

time, however, once solid interpretative frames have been established, the possibility of identifying other potential conflicts becomes limited and other ways of representing the same theme are needed. In this sense, the construction of reality, created by relatively marginal actors responsible for mobilizing movements, is inextricably linked to asymmetries of power.

Prognostic element

The action of interpreting the world goes beyond identifying problems, however. It involves seeking solutions, hypothesizing new social patterns, new ways of regulating relationships between groups, new articulations of consensus and of the exercise of power. There is often a strong utopian dimension present in this endeavor. The symbolic elaboration of a movement is thus not necessarily limited to the selection, on the basis of the parameters of instrumental rationality, of “practical” goals in a given social and cultural context. Rather, it opens new spaces and new prospects for action, making it possible to think of aims and objectives which the dominant culture tends instead to exclude from the outset. In this sense, it is possible to conceive of movements as media through which concepts and perspectives, which might otherwise have remained marginal, are disseminated in society. Michel Foucault (1977) noted, for example, that over time not only what is thought changes, but what *can* be thought or conceived of as well. This applies to every phase of insurgency in collective action: it is, in fact, in these circumstances that spaces which were previously inconceivable unexpectedly appear, enabling action to take place (Alberoni 1984; Melucci 1989, 1991).

Various prognostic elements might be present within the same movement. For example, critics of globalization adopt very diverse views regarding the alternatives. Some of them have an approach that Anheier et al. (2001) define as “rejectionist”: they express an overall refusal of globalization as a manifestation of global capitalism. Overall, however, this is a very diverse front, consistent with the fact that opposition to capitalism has historically come from very different origins. Leftist organizations and anticapitalist social movements may stress the exploitative practices of global free markets and call for an overthrow of capitalism. Nationalist opponents may found their opposition to capitalism on very different grounds, stressing the threat to national sovereignty by transnational powers, and thus calling for protectionist economic policies and stricter limitations to the circulation of goods and people. Religious fundamentalists may target first of all the spread of individualistic, American-dominated worldviews and lifestyles and the resulting threats to the identity and moral values of specific populations. Whatever the origins of the criticism, political intervention in the global arena by either military superpowers or the UN is to be condemned as imperialistic intervention into local affairs.

Another critical position comes from those whom Anheier et al. (2001) define as “alternatives.” Many grassroots groups, countercultural networks, groups searching for viable alternatives to dominant economic practices and lifestyles, do not aim so much to destroy capitalism as to be able to “opt out” of it; namely, to promote experiments in local sustainable economic development, projects in the area of sustainable, GM-free agriculture, alternative and socially responsible trade. From this perspective, the political element is relatively peripheral by comparison to other critical stances. Political intervention in conflicts around the world may be useful as long as it is under the control of civil-society organizations and is based exclusively on nonviolent means; for example, think of peace actions and conflict resolution initiatives in contentious areas such as Israel or the Balkans in the 1990s.

Yet another widespread attitude towards globalization, encompassing both international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), representatives of international institutions, governments, as well as many social movements, could be characterized as “reformist” (Anheier et al. 2001). While the growing circulation of people, goods, and information across regional and national boundaries is regarded in positive terms, what comes under criticism – even fierce criticism – is the form of such processes to date. Accordingly, a whole range of measures are required to reduce the power of transnational business and financial operators and to increase the role of economic as well as political institutions in regulating flows of exchanges. Active measures to redress social injustice and inequality are in order. The more active political participation of international institutions may be accepted as long as it is explicitly aimed at enforcing human rights and protecting local civil societies in nondemocratic countries, rather than protecting Western states and business special interests.

To sum up, no-global movements are not just anticapitalist, which would make them, in many people’s eyes, “outmoded”; nor purely altruistic in the traditional sense (similarly outmoded); and not even purely reactionary forces (even more outmoded). The attempt to find new ways of defining the world, summarized by the slogan “Another world is possible,” does not go much further than defining an ultimate goal with which anybody can easily identify. It is still an open debate whether the antiglobalization movement should best be seen as a movement with multiple, loose frames rather than a dominant one (a feature that some, e.g. Westby 2002, attribute to most movements anyway); or whether we can nonetheless identify some relatively homogeneous core ideas, as others (e.g. Andretta 2003) suggest.

Motivational element

On another level, symbolic elaboration is essential in order to produce the motivation and the incentives needed for action. The unknowable outcomes and the

costs associated with collective action can be overcome only if the actors are convinced (intuitively even before rationally) of the opportunity for mobilizing and of the practicability and the legitimacy of the action. It is therefore important that frames do not only address the level of social groups and of collective actors, but link the individual sphere with that of collective experience. At the same time, they must generalize a certain problem or controversy, showing the connections with other events or with the condition of other social groups; and also demonstrate the relevance of a given problem to individual life experiences (Benford and Snow 2000: 619; Williams 2004: 105). Along with the critique of dominant representations of order and of social patterns, interpretative frames must therefore produce new definitions of the foundations of collective solidarity, to transform actors' identity in a way which favors action. Gamson (1992b) captures this multiplicity of dimensions when he identifies three central components of the collective construction of the terms: injustice, agency, and identity frames. As motivational framing strongly connects with identity-building, we shall discuss this point in greater detail in the next chapter, when dealing with the role of identity.

Master Frames

Differences between frames and ideology should be easier to catch now. Framing is more flexible a cultural product than ideology, at the same time more specific and more generic than the latter. It does not require a whole coherent set of integrated principles and assumptions but provides instead a key to make sense of the world. In many cases, frames originate from ideologies – for instance, when blue-collar workers experiencing degraded urban living conditions draw on Marxist ideology to suggest that environmental urban crisis could be read as an outcome of the spread of mechanisms of capitalist exploitation from the factory and the labor market to its surrounding community. In other cases, however, frames can affect ideologies. For example, in early nineteenth-century society, generic representations of industrial machines and working conditions as evil were not restricted to working-class organizers but shared with actors with very different viewpoints and goals, such as charitable organizations or churches. Nevertheless, they provided working-class activists with a set of images and symbols that they could use to elaborate more articulated political ideologies.

Differences between ideologies and frames do not prevent us from thinking of frames as capable of delivering broad interpretations of reality. This is particularly true of master frames. The expression reflects the fact that movements and conflicts do not develop in isolation but tend rather to be concentrated in particular political and historical periods (Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975; Tarrow 1989a, 1998). This has consequences at the level of symbolic elaboration, and the discourse of a single movement (or the organization of a movement) must be

placed in relation to the general orientations of a given period. If it is possible to identify conjunctions which are particularly favorable to the development of collective action, the dominant visions of the world in that period will inform – or at least influence – the representations produced by the movements taken together.⁵ Thus a restricted number of master frames (or dominant interpretative frames: Snow and Benford 1989, 1992) will emerge, to which the specific elaborations of the various organizations or movements can be reduced, more or less directly.

In the early 1970s in Italy, social movements defined conflict in terms of class struggle. At that time, various types of conflict were often interpreted and classified in the light of the Marxist model. The women's movement was first seen from the perspective of emancipation and conquest of equal opportunities rather than as an affirmation of gender differences. In the same way, representations of youth movements often connected their collective action with their social position and their precarious status. At a more directly political level, the rapid transformation of the student movement into little groups organized to resemble – or to caricature – the Leninist party can also be considered proof of Marxism's cultural domination. Models of counterculture and political proposals such as that of the environmentalists, which had little in common with representations of a class nature, were accorded little space in the development of the movements, although they were also present (Lumley 1990). It was only after the salience of dominant cleavages was drastically reduced in the 1980s that collective action was framed under different cultural models such as environmentalism (Diani 1995a). Likewise, Noonan's (1995) analysis of mobilizations by Chilean women shows that their activism in the years before Pinochet was largely framed in terms of motherhood, due to the combination of social movements' heavy Marxist framing and conservative antifeminist feelings. It was only when a "return to democracy" frame, less charged in terms of class conflict, established itself in the social movement sector in the 1980s that space for new feminist frames reemerged.

In contrast, in the USA, interpretative frames linked to the role of individuals, to their rights and aspirations for personal and civic growth, acquired considerable weight after the start of the protest wave of the 1960s. The resulting cultural climate facilitated the spread of movements profoundly different from those which had developed in Italy. At a more directly political level, movements mobilized for freedom of expression (such as the Free Speech Movement), or full citizenship for African Americans, or against American involvement in Vietnam (McAdam 1988b; Eyerman and Jamison 1991: ch. 5). The presence of alternative and countercultural movements was also more evident. These were not limited to strictly communitarian and other world-rejecting forms, typical of the hippy movement and various religious currents of neo-orientalist derivation. They also showed some overlap with broader attempts to support practices designed to

encourage inner growth and individual realization, as in the case of the human potential movement.⁶

More recently, opposition to neoliberal globalization has operated, according to some observers, as a master frame (Andretta 2003). The idea that the growing interdependence of economic life and the resulting reduction of barriers to the circulation of capital threaten the living conditions of the large majority of the world's population has brought together farmers of the South, affected by the dominance of multinational agribusinesses and the spread of genetically modified organisms, with trade unionists of the North, who see global liberalization and the resulting fall in corporate tax revenue as a major blow to the modern welfare state. Concerns for the obstacles posed to the free circulation of people, in stark contrast to the free circulation of goods and financial assets, for the profits globalization is often bringing to corrupted authoritarian regimes in Southern countries (Tilly 2004a: ch.5), and for the rising indifference to human rights even in Western democracies, following 9/11, all create a common ground between activists of radical libertarian movements in the West and charities working in developing countries. The indifference to environmental preservation displayed by the very same actors that in developing countries lead economic growth along authoritarian lines, oblivious to workers' rights, and the open hostility demonstrated by right-wing governments in the West, most notably the Bush administration in the US, toward environmental standards, create a common ground for Western environmentalists and the broad coalitions opposing environmental destruction and social exploitation in developing countries (Rothman and Oliver 1999; Doyle 2002). Of course, it remains to be seen whether the overall capacity of the frame to connect so many different experiences is also matched by a corresponding capacity to articulate issues and strategies in local contexts (Tarrow 2005). Still, antineoliberal globalism seems to represent a powerful unifying symbol for many, very diverse, actors worldwide.

3.2.3 Sense-making activities: linking values and frames

Under what conditions are frames successful? Resonance is shaped by credibility and salience (Benford and Snow 2000: 619). Frames should be credible, both in their content and in their sources. Incoherent messages, or messages coming from actors with a shaky reputation, or who are unknown, are unlikely to elicit the same reception as messages from actors with an established public image.⁷ Frames should also be salient, i.e. touch upon meaningful and important aspects of people's lives, and show a high "narrative fidelity" (Benford and Snow 2000). Most important, they should resonate not only with their targets, but with the broader cultural structure in which a movement develops (Williams 2004: 105–8).

Successful frames emerge through a variety of ways and forms of cultural production that it would make little sense to try and systematically present here. To put it very simply, and perhaps rather simplistically, the basic precondition for success is that processes of “frame alignment” take place between movement activists and the populations they intend to mobilize. In other words, what is necessary is a “linkage of individual and SMO interpretative orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals and ideology are congruent and complementary” (Snow et al. 1986: 464; see also Gamson 1988; Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Collective action thus becomes possible at the point at which mobilizing messages are integrated with some cultural component from the population to which they are addressed.

A major form of frame alignment is what Snow and associates call “frame bridging.” This happens when representations by movement organizers incorporate interpretations of reality produced by sectors of public opinion which might otherwise remain separated from each other. Frame bridging can take place at different levels. For example, critiques of the excesses of neoliberal globalization need not necessarily take an anticapitalist or anti-imperialist form. They may also be shared by actors who do not object to globalization *per se*, but to the lack of regulation over global economic actors and to its implications for democracy (reformers, in Anheier et al.’s terms [2001]). One example comes from the bestselling book, *The Silent Takeover*, by business and management expert-cum-writer Noreena Hertz (2001). Its recognition that business activities may be as beneficial as pernicious and its author’s standing as an academic and business consultant can make its points accessible to both critical sectors of the business community and left-wing critics of globalization (although some of the latter might regard people like Hertz as opponents rather than fellow campaigners). On a different level, numerous examples of frame bridging can be found in the documents produced by organizations in the global justice movement. For example, the World Trade Union Organization, a network of unions which also comprises the European Trade Unions, connects social and environmental justice as follows: “The international institutions must contribute to the balanced economic and social development of all countries, with trade and the use of natural resources taking place in the framework of sustainable development policies that respect the environment, in both producer and consumer countries” (cited in Andretta 2003).

Another important form of frame alignment is what Snow et al. (1986) call frame extension. It allows the specific concerns of a movement or organization to relate to more general goals, in contexts where the connection might not be at all evident. Let us think for example of ATTAC, the network originally born in France from the input of leftist intellectuals such as Ignacio Ramonet (Ancelovici 2002). Given ATTAC’s original and major goal of introducing a tax on financial transactions (the Tobin Tax, so called after its proponent, economist

James Tobin), it could easily be perceived as a single-issue organization with a relatively limited domain of action. Hence, frame extension is of the utmost importance for ATTAC or similar organizations. This results in messages articulating the connection between financial globalization and the broad range of problems it generates: “Financial globalization increases economic insecurity and social inequalities. It bypasses and undermines popular decision-making, democratic institutions, and sovereign states responsible for the general interest. In their place, it substitutes a purely speculative logic that expresses nothing more than the interests of multinational corporations and financial markets . . . collected for the most part by industrialized countries, where the principal financial markets are located, [the money originating from the Tobin tax] could be used to help struggle against inequalities, to promote education and public health in poor countries, and for food security and sustainable development” (cited in Andretta 2003).

Frame alignment broadly relies on a dynamic relationship between the development of a movement and the cultural heritage of both the country in which it operates and its institutions.⁸ First, movements make reference to cultural currents which, while well rooted in a given country, are somehow overshadowed (Alberoni 1984). This applies to progressive and conservative movements alike. For example, the new right in the US has drawn inspiration largely from the authoritarian, communitarian, illiberal traditions of American society. While liberal culture was, in the 1960s and the early 1970s, able to limit the impact of the new right on public discourse, these currents have remained alive in broad sections of public opinion, and since the 1980s have resurfaced to exert a very important role in public discourse – especially with the Bush administrations (Wallis and Bruce 1986; Bruce 1988; Oberschall 1993: ch. 13; Herman 1997; Blee 2002; Woodberry and Smith 1998; Kniss and Burns 2004).

Second, emerging movements draw on their own traditional heritage and on that of the broader oppositional movements in a given country, presenting them, however, from a new perspective. Western ethnonational movements of the 1960s and 1970s were often successful in linking traditional themes of peripheral nationalism, such as territory or language, which were previously perceived to be predominantly a conservative issue, with radical, anti-establishment perspectives typical of youth countercultures, or with antimilitarist and antinuclear struggles of the period. The critique of the distortion of capitalist development provided a common base for challenges to the economic subordination of “internal colonies” and for solidarity with third-world anticolonialist movements (Touraine, Dubet, Hegedus, and Wieviorka 1981; Touraine, Dubet, Wieviorka, and Strzelecki 1983; Beer 1980; Melucci and Diani 1992; Connor 1994). Likewise, activists of no-global movements drew on several different recent traditions of collective action such as environmentalism, social justice, and internationalism, and somehow managed to integrate them, or at least to

identify some shared themes that sounded plausible enough to motivate people to act.

Social movements' frames are often elaborated in reference to elements which form part of the institutionalized culture of a given people. In that context, religion plays a very important role. Even in advanced industrial democracies the role of religion as a source of symbols and identity is far from negligible (Platt & Williams 2002; Young 2002; Williams 1999 and 2002; Inglehart and Norris 2005). Rhys Williams (2004: 107–8) has recently summarized the reasons why religion plays such an important role in the US: the inherent challenge one can find in any religious message, despite its specific contents, and the reluctance to simply accept the world as it is; the availability of religious symbols and language to a very broad range of social groups, from the most established to the most dispossessed; the capacity of most religions – with the possible exception of the most sectarian ones – to speak for the majority of the population and sound legitimate even to those who are not religious themselves (think of the Pope in the anti-Iraqi war initiatives).

For example, the “Churches of the World” network articulates its opposition to neoliberal globalization in the following terms: “We are part of the prophetic ecumenical fellowship looking critically at globalization. And since biblical references are used, amongst other things, to justify globalization, our task is to challenge that in the light of our own reading of the Bible” (cited in Andretta 2003). In the US, religious congregations have also been a context in which to transmit messages to audiences not particularly receptive of explicitly political messages. For example, religious groups campaigning for human rights in central America used religious congregations to spread the outrage and indignation for the murders of prominent religious personalities such as Archbishop Romero in El Salvador (Wood 2003; Nepstad 2001, 2004).

Another well-known example comes from Martin Luther King. In contrast to other leaders of the Afro-American civil rights movement in the 1960s, King was careful in his speeches not to emphasize the differences between blacks and whites. In fact, he tended to avoid the construction of “polemical identities.” Instead, he used references to the themes and the values of the heritage of the white American elites of that period, such as the relationship between individual liberty and a sense of responsibility towards the community (McAdam 1994: 38). It was precisely these values, rather than antagonistic values, which provided him with a base from which to argue the full legitimacy of the demands of the civil rights movement (McAdam 1994; Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 166–74).

In different ways, these examples of symbolic re-elaboration remind us that collective action is both a creative manipulation of new symbols and a reaffirmation of tradition. The insurgence of a new wave of mobilization does not, in fact, represent simply a signal of innovation and change, in relation to the culture and the principles prevalent in a given period. It is also, if to a varying extent, a

confirmation of the fundamental continuity of values and historic memories which have, in recent times, been neglected or forgotten (see also Stamatov 2002; Jansen 2003).

Reference to the past can operate both as an obstacle and as an opportunity for action. It can represent an obstacle in that long-established ways of thinking and value systems can noticeably reduce the range of options available to the actor (Lofland 1995; Johnston and Klandermans 1995). Too strong an identification with tradition, or, in the same way, an excessive distance between the culture of the activists and sympathizers in a movement, and the rest of society, can in certain cases reduce the efficiency of symbolic re-elaboration (Swidler 1986). It can, in particular, make the processes of realignment of interpretative frames, crucial for the success of mobilization, very difficult. On the other hand, the ability to refer to one's cultural heritage puts the cognitive and value-related resources at the disposal of actors. On the basis of these resources, it is possible to found alternative projects and an alternative political identity. In the absence of references to one's own history and to the particular nature of one's roots, an appeal to something new risks seeming inconsistent and, in the end, lacking in legitimacy.

3.3 Problems and Responses

Recently, the role of frames has also been the subject of considerable discussion. Analyses of collective action centered on the concept of interpretative frames – just as those which focus on the role of organizational resources or of political opportunities – are not exempt from *ad hoc* explanations. At any moment it is possible to uncover the existence within a given society of a multiplicity of cultural models. It is not, therefore, difficult for those studying any movement enjoying a certain success, to identify the cultural elements with which the specific interpretative frame of the movement is aligned. This poses the problem of formulating systematic hypotheses concerning the relationship between symbolic production activities and the success of attempts at mobilization set up by movement organizations. It is therefore necessary to link the properties of different modes of categorization of reality to the specific nature of the movements and the conflicts which these represent. But it is essential to identify, as a preliminary step, classification criteria for interpretative frames (see Eyerman and Jamison 1991; Diani 1996 for some examples).

The explanatory capacity of frames *vis-à-vis* alternative interpretations of collective action has also been controversial. Is it more important, for the success of a social movement, to have good communicators, or to operate in favorable political conditions, such as divided political elites? For example, in their investigation of conflicts on nuclear power in the 1970s and 1980s in several Western

countries, Koopmans and Duyvendak (1995) argued that for all the importance of communication, it was a favorable configuration of opportunities that ultimately helped some antinuclear movements and not others to win the discursive battle. Other studies, however, suggested the opposite. Cress and Snow's (2000) analysis of success of 15 homeless organizations in different US cities suggests that the way in which the homelessness issue was framed actually affected those organizations' chances of securing political recognition or concrete relief. The same applies to a recent study of suffrage organizations in the US from 1866 to 1914 (McCammon 2001; Hewitt and McCammon 2004). Of course, in evaluating these results we have to take into account the different units of analysis. While in a comparison between nations it is difficult to identify the impact of framing strategies, more fine-grained explorations of specific cases might well assign symbolic factors a greater weight.

The framing perspective on collective action has also come under fire from researchers, most interested in cultural dynamics, including the original proponents of the concept (Benford 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Goodwin and Jasper 2004a; Mische 2003). In many instances frames have indeed been treated as static cognitive structures; very little attention has been paid, according to critics, to the way frames are generated and evolve over time, usually in a dialogical relationship between different actors. In the last decade, numerous studies have tried to address this problem by focusing on the dynamic elements of discursive practices. In a major study of conflicts on abortion in the US and Germany, Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht (2002) have illustrated the contentious nature and the multiple spheres involved in the processes whereby abortion issues become the object of conflicting public discourses. Steinberg (1999) has documented the transformations in the rhetorical forms adopted by nineteenth-century English cotton-spinners as their mobilizations evolved over time (see also Ellingson 1995; Polletta 2002; McCaffrey and Keys 2000). Mische (2003) has moved one step further, illustrating how discursive and conversational dynamics not only create new representations of experience, but also constitute relations between social actors (see also Somers 1992). Main advocates of the frame approach have placed greater emphasis on framing practices rather than on frames *per se*, and on the processes through which frames are transformed (Snow 2004: 393–6; see also Cadena-Roa 2002).

The dynamic role of cultural production has also been noted by researchers from a different background than cultural sociology, and closer to the value perspective to culture than to the frame perspective. In his broad investigation of cultural change, with prevalent but not exclusive reference to the US, Rochon (1998) has stressed its dynamic and process-oriented elements. Rather than being generated, *à la* Inglehart, by macrostructural transformations (such as growth of education or rising affluence) affecting the way individuals conceive of their own situation and life projects, value change is a critical struggle in which multiple

actors are involved. For critical values to establish themselves, the role of critical communities is essential. It is from such communities – that may include from time to time activists, artists, intellectuals, and the like – that social movements emerge as major agents of cultural change (see also Melucci 1989, 1996; Rupp and Taylor 2003; Williams 2004: 99).

Another related issue is whether frames – and in particular framing skills – should be treated as a particular type of resource, subject to strategic use by skilled political entrepreneurs. Several passages in the original formulations of the framing perspective indeed suggest a view of this kind (Snow et al. 1986; Gamson 1990, 1992a). The most forceful critique of this position has come from theorists who have recently brought back the study of emotions into social movement analysis. From their point of view, cultural interpretations conducive to collective action do not so much originate from cognitive processes and strategic framing as from collective processes with a strong emotional dimension. It is often explicit confrontation with anger and injustice, or direct experience of collective solidarity, rather than political entrepreneurs' skillful manipulation, that move people to collective action (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001 and 2004; for illustrations: Barker 2001; Berezin 2001).

3.4 Summary

There are at least two ways of looking at the relationship between collective action and culture. The first stresses above all the role of values. Action is thus seen to originate from the identification of social actors with certain sets of principles and concerns. Interpretations of movements in recent decades, based on these premises, have insisted in particular on the shift from materialist values to postmaterialist values. More recently, however, the growing relevance of fundamentalist religious movements (not only within Islam but also within Christianity) has drawn analysts' attention to another, very different version of the relationship between values and collective action.

The second approach, which we have dealt with here, underlines instead the cognitive elements of culture. In this context, mobilization does not depend so much on values as on how social actors assign meaning to their experience: i.e., on the processes of interpretation of reality which identify social problems as "social" and make collective action sound like an adequate and feasible response to a condition perceived as unjust. Action is facilitated by "frame alignment," in other words, by the convergence of models of interpretation of reality adopted by movement activists and those of the population which they intend to mobilize.

Movements' cultural production implies a relationship which involves both conquering and revitalizing aspects (or at least some aspects) of a given

population's traditions. This is both an impediment and a resource for action. It is also worth noting that explanations of collective action, centered on the concept of the "interpretative frame," often carry the risk of *ad hoc* explanations. One way out of this difficulty lies in linking various types of interpretative frames developed by actors with certain perceptions of the political opportunities provided by the environment. Recently, the framing perspective has been criticized for its excessive dependence on cognitive elements, to the detriment of the emotional elements of collective action. In the next chapter, which looks at mechanisms for production of identity, we shall see how the cultural and symbolic dimensions are linked to the subjective experience of the individual.