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Position Paper concerning the “call for articles”:

*Framing Protest:
Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America
(Nineteenth-Twentieth centuries)*

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Collective interests and identities, notions of rights and justice, and specific claims and collective demands are (partly) shaped by the interpretive frames through which people make sense of the world. This view is quite widely accepted by now, in studies on labor history, social movements, and popular politics. Hence the current interest in “languages of politics”, which enable and constrain what can be imagined and said in the political arena; “collective action frames”, which define specific conditions as unjust and show what collective actors can do about it;¹ popular nationalist discourse that shapes political change on different levels of society;² and “languages of class” and “identity stories” that specify and enforce distinctions between “us” and “them” and create (new) political practices.³

Such ideological frames are produced by people, in social interaction. This process merits special attention. *How* this process takes place, *by whom*, and with what *effects* on popular activism (how they enable and constrain collective action), are the issues we want to explore in this supplement of the IRSH. Placed center stage are the people who create and diffuse such activist frames, people we have dubbed “popular intellectuals”. Social historians and anthropologists have retrieved from obscurity a wide variety of such “framing specialists”: worker-poets in nineteenth-century France who developed a distinct image of workers as a class, “peasant intellectuals” in Tanzania, who organized social and political movements and developed new critical discourses in the process, provincial journalists in late-colonial Java who translated western liberal and socialist ideas into local models, indigenous activists in Latin America and Muslim teachers and missionaries in Southeast Asian villages.⁴ These

¹ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest”, in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT, 1992), pp. 133-155. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge [etc.], 1996).

² Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley, CA, 1995); David Nugent, *Modernity at the Edge of Empire: State, Individual, and Nation in the Northern Peruvian Andes, 1885-1935* (Stanford, CA, 1997).

³ Lenard R. Berlanstein, “Working with Language: The Linguistic Turn in French Labor History. A Review Article”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33 (1991), pp. 426-440; Edward F. Fischer, *Cultural Logics and Global Economics: Maya Identity in Thought and Practice* (Austin, TX, 2001); Charles R. Hale, “Cultural Politics of Identity in Latin America”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), pp. 567-590; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1983); Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Lanham, MD, 2002).

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth-Century France* (Philadelphia, PA, 1989); Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison, WI, 1990); Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-26* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, NJ, 1998); Joanne

studies form a powerful incentive to look beyond the category of “traditional” intellectuals (highly educated, urban, relatively autonomous in the political field) and to consider, as well, the many other types of framing specialists who matter in periods of protest.

We invite contributors to address the following questions:

- Who are the people who venture in this ideological work, for whom do they speak, and how do their views relate to the perceptions of the people they claim to represent (this question may recall discussions on Gramsci’s “organic” intellectuals, “traditional” semi-independent intellectuals, intellectual vanguards, and social-movement intellectuals). What is their role in the emergence and socio-political activities of specific social movements?
- How do these popular intellectuals interact with other activist actors and their discourses, within wider spheres of contentious politics which link local intellectuals to national and international networks (and, for instance, to international ideologies of socialism, human rights, or ethnic nationalism). How do these interactions affect the ideological frames they develop and adopt, with what effect on the process and outcome of collective actions? In broader terms: How were specific ideological perspectives or frames created and how did these become widely shared? What is the historical interplay between ideology and social action and how did this lead to what Michael Vester has called “cycles of learning” by which social movements develop new strategies and ideas?⁵
- Since many popular protests target state authorities and try to appeal to state-supported notions of rights and justice, how does the state react to, and influence, the work of framing protest?

In the following, we suggest several related perspectives and themes to analyze these social dynamics of framing protest:

1) *Popular intellectuals within networks of interaction.* Social movements consist of a sustained series of interactions among a large number of relevant actors, in particular, activists, supporters, and the object of the activists’ claims, but also “allies, competitors, enemies, authorities, and multiple audiences”.⁶ Framing activities are part of these interactions. They concern “ideas forged in dialogue”.⁷ As the main proponents of frame analysis argue, frames are produced and altered through “the interpretive discussions and debates that social movement actors engage in among each other”, but also in “the framing contests that occur between movement actors and other parties within the movement field of action, such as countermovements, adversaries, and even the media”.⁸

Rappaport, *Cumbe Reborn: An Andean Ethnography of History* (Chicago, IL, 1994); Edward F. Fischer, *Cultural Logics and Global Economics: Maya Identity in Thought and Practice* (Austin, TX, 2001); Robert W. Hefner and Patricia Horvatich (eds), *Islam in an Era of Nation-States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia* (Honolulu, 1997).

⁵ Michael Vester, *Die Entstehung des Proletariats als Lernproces: Zur Sociologie der Arbeiterbewegung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970).

⁶ Tilly, *Stories, Identity, and Political Change*, p. 88.

⁷ Anthony Milner, *The Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya: Contesting Nationalism and the Expansion of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 289.

⁸ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Mobilization Forum: Clarifying the Relationship between Framing and Ideology”, *Mobilization*, 5 (2000), pp. 55-60, 56. See also Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach* (University Park, PA, 1991)

2) The cultural dynamics of contention involves considerable *improvisation, adaptation, and innovation*, constrained by earlier established perceptions. The term “contentious conversations” describes such interactions well.⁹ In the process, social boundaries are redrawn, and identity categories and classifications presented in sharper relief, such as “nation”, “ethnic identity”, and “class”.¹⁰ Contention may involve the appropriation of official state discourses and their use for anti-state goals. For instance, the Andean indigenous movement which was headed by the so-called *mensajeros apoderados* (“empowered messengers”) used colonial documents and concepts to resist intervention by the post-colonial republican state.

3) *The nature and effects of cultural brokerage*. Popular intellectuals may tap into various “cultural flows”,¹¹ connect different sets of ideas, develop these into new models, and broadcast these through various networks of communication. For instance, historical and anthropological research in Africa has highlighted the importance of “traditional” discourses and cultural elements like witchcraft and dancing in the formulation of anti-colonial discourses.¹² Latin American scribes (*tintilleros*) fulfilled a necessary role in the relations between indigenous communities and the central state in 19th century Latin America but, as intellectual and political intermediaries between different spheres of society, their social and political position could become quite ambiguous.¹³ It is therefore necessary to analyse the evolution of the social and political position of these intermediaries in specific periods of time.

4) *New “languages of politics”*. Intellectuals may produce discourses that provide others with new conceptual space for articulating collective interests, identities, and claims. Socialist intelligentsia in Asia, *indigenista* intellectuals in Latin America, Marxist students in Africa, and Islamic religious reformists in the Muslim world, are among those groups who created political and discursive spaces which could be used by popular collective actors to their own advantage.¹⁴ For late-colonial Malaysia, for instance, Milner shows how liberal journalists and pamphleteers, religious leaders and writers, and royal spokesmen, engaged in a contentious ideological debate on the future of their society (what it should look like, how it should be changed).¹⁵ In the process, they created a new political discourse which set the ideological terms for subsequent political mobilization and collective action.

5) *The interaction between popular intellectuals at local, regional, and (inter)national levels*. Various categories of actors may interpret the same movement and the same social changes in radically different ways, but still find points of connection that motivate their cooperation. For instance, in the 1970s in a district in revolutionary Ethiopia, urban Marxist students

⁹ Tilly, *Stories, Identity, and Political Change*, p. 13. See also Javier Auyero, “The Judge, the Cop, and the Queen of Carnival: Ethnography, Storytelling, and the (Contested) Meanings of Protest”, *Theory and Society*, 31 (2002), pp. 151-187.

¹⁰ Cf. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (New York, 2001)

¹¹ Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York, 1992).

¹² Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970* (Berkeley, CA, 1975); Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville, VA, 1997); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and its Malcontents. Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago, IL, 1993).

¹³ Michiel Baud, *Intelectuales y sus utopías: Indigenismo y la imaginación de América Latina* (Amsterdam, 2003)

¹⁴ For example, Hefner and Horvatic, *Islam in an Era of Nation-States*, and Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics*.

¹⁵ Milner, *Invention of Politics in Colonial Malaya*.

gained most support among evangelical Christians. Though the student vanguard was inspired by “narratives of the Chinese and Russian revolutions” and the peasant vanguard by “stories of previous Evangelical conversion”, they shared a master frame of “modernity”, “progress”, and resistance against anything associated with “tradition”, which facilitated a connection between the two groups.¹⁶

Within a social movement, top-level idea-specialists may provide the official movement frame, but local organizers may adapt this frame to local perceptions and conditions, or may challenge those parts that contradict their own perceived interests.¹⁷ Such differences in perception may have unforeseen effects, including frictions, defections, and local activists recruiting through a frame that does not at all fit the vision of the leaders.

¹⁶ Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), p. xvii.

¹⁷ James C. Scott, “Revolution in the Revolution: Peasants and Commissars”, *Theory and Society*, 7 (1979), pp. 97-134. Also, Rosanne Rutten, “High-Cost Activism and the Worker Household: Interests, Commitment, and the Costs of Revolutionary Activism in a Philippine Plantation Region”, *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000), pp. 215-252.