

## **Can we measure the influence of social movements?**

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### **Abstract**

For three decades new social movements have undergone scrutiny from political scientists with much written about why social movements exist and how they attract members. However little has been done on the influence of these mass mobilisations. In this paper I investigate normative and empirical statements about social movements in order to develop a way to measure the influence of these phenomenon. Current social movement literature provides few tools that can be used to measure social movement influence. I will argue that the influence of mass mobilisations on the political realm can be measured using discourse analysis techniques and by looking to public policy literature. I will then test this methodology by looking at the influence of the New Zealand women's movement on debates surrounding child care and unpaid work.

### **Introduction**

In societies where the health of democracy is often gauged by the ability of citizens to have a say in the decisions affecting them, the whole system is undermined by mass disengagement. This leads to attempts to 'rescue' modern democracies through claims that citizens are engaged with politics but not in the traditional ways. People are not joining political parties but they are involved with mass mobilisations like the environmental and women's movements. Democratisation in this sense is largely seen as a matter of the progressive inclusion of various groups in political life<sup>1</sup> even if that political involvement is outside mainstream political institutions. While it is yet to be proved that citizens are actively engaging in greater numbers in social movement activity, neither do we know whether social movements influence democratic decision-making? In this paper I will look at democracy in terms of responsiveness<sup>2</sup> and evaluate the role of social movements as carriers of citizens' voices in light of this. If social movements are seen as an important supplement (or a favoured alternative) to political parties, outcomes from democratic processes should reflect their involvement in the decision-making process. As Melucci notes:

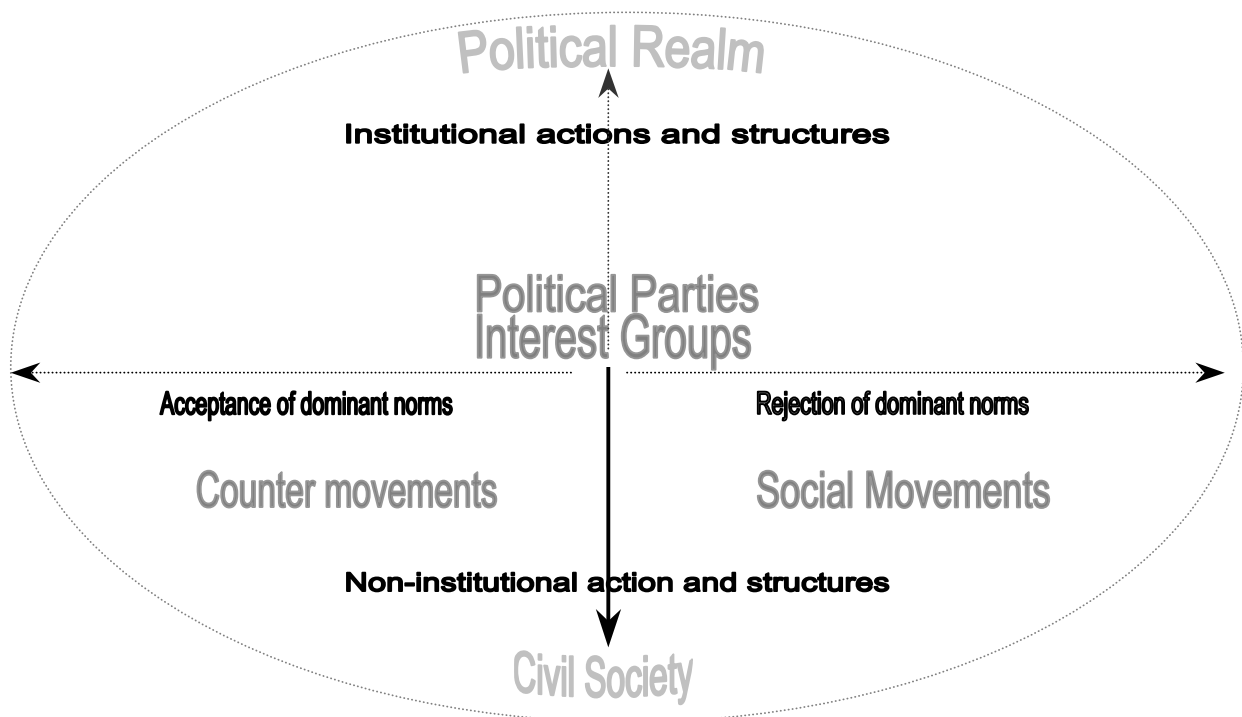
A new political space is designed beyond the traditional distinction between state and "civil society": an intermediate *public space*, whose function is not to institutionalise the movement nor to transform them into parties but to make society hear their message and translate these messages into political decision making, while movements maintain their autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

### **Parties, Interest Groups, and Social Movements**

Social movements exist in society on the political landscape with other forms of collective action, but they are set apart by a number of factors from other actors such as political parties, interest group (including advocacy groups and lobby groups), and

counter-movements. Social movements are collectives of individuals and groups who share a common cognitive praxis (one in opposition to dominant norms) and who use unconventional forms of action and structures at least some of the time to bring social change. While social movements are forms of collective action with distinct characteristics, the divisions between the various collectives found in democracies are not impenetrable. Individuals and small groups of actors from within a social movement can create or join interest groups or political parties, and vice versa. Individual actors may even exist in several different collectives at one time. The only mutually exclusive realms are those of counter-movements and social movements, as one has appeared in reaction and opposition to the other. (See figure 1)

**Figure 1**



As already touched upon the type of political and social action taken by social movements is one factor that sets them apart from other political actors. Social movements use non-institutional or unconventional modes of action in their attempts to force social change. The non-institutionalised tactics of movements has two distinct parts. The first is that social movement action is directed outside the realm of formal politics, parties, and government. These disaffected groups use tactics such as protests, boycotts, slogan painting, sit-ins, grass-roots meetings, and revolutions to bring social change. The notion of non-institutional tactics also suggests the actions are not governed by rules and norms, it is the idea that social movements somehow erupt spontaneously.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, political parties and interest groups are forms of collective action that work within the existing political system, use more established and formal structures, and rely on a range

of institutional tactics such as negotiations, letter writing, petitions, and lobbying in order to bring social change. These points of distinction do not totally separate social movements from more formal collectives. A social movement may seek the support of a political party or government to have changes enacted through laws. As John Dryzek sees it activities by social movements often take place in civil society but result in democratic power being exercised over the state.<sup>5</sup> There is acknowledgement within democratic representation literature that good democratic decision-making is reliant on activity from both the political and civic realms.<sup>6</sup>

Another feature of social movements found in existing definitions is that they are collectives of groups and individuals who share a common discourse or identity. Social movements are seen as both creators of new knowledge and challengers of the dominant codes of society.<sup>7</sup> Eyerman and Jamison note that it is the movement's cognitive praxis that distinguishes one movement from another and what gives a social movement its significance for broader social processes.<sup>8</sup> For example, the women's movement is a collective of numerous individuals and groups who share a grievance about the oppression of women which is encoded in dominant cultural norms. In this respect, being a member or a non-member of the women's movement refers to an ideational commitment.<sup>9</sup>

So what groups found in modern democracies fit the definition of collectives form around distinctive discourses (rejecting dominant norms) that uses non-institutional tactics and informal structures in order to bring about social change? Ian Marsh sets out nine 'issues movements' which he says have emerged in Western democracies since 1960s: women's, peace, environment, consumer, gay rights, animal liberation, ethnic, racial minority and 'New Right' movements.<sup>10</sup> Such a list should be taken as a snap shot of movements existing at a particular place and time, as the landscape for non-institutional action to bring social change is not static. Any definition for use in empirical investigations of social movement influence must be tight enough to delineate between movements and other forms of collective action, but not so static as to prevent acknowledgement of changes in the landscape of collective action. Collectives may generate new social movements from recognition of new grievances. Existing movements may cease to exist. If all organisations and individuals associated with a social movement shift from use of non-institutional tactics and forms to work completely within the existing political system, they change their status from social movement to that of an interest group. One of the most difficult things about investigations of social movements is the very fact that they keep changing necessarily making empirical inquiries historically contingent. However in order to further empirical investigations of social movement influence the subject of inquiries should focus on collective citizen activity that falls outside the rubric of state politics at least some of the time and that challenge the existing social discourses.

There are a number of arenas which social movement's target in order to bring social change:

**Figure 2**

<b>Targets of social movement action</b>
<i>Internal targets</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the movement organisation</li><li>• the movement actors</li></ul>
<i>External targets</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the culture of society</li><li>• the political system/state</li></ul>

When looking to measure the influence of social movements it is the external targets that will prove most worthwhile. Internal changes to a social movement operations and on citizens participating in collective action are important, but it is the influence of these mass mobilisations on the rest of the society which is of concern when looking at social movements as important players in the process of democratic decision-making. I will focus on the 'political' impact of social movements, as political influence would result in the ends of the social movement action being binding on the wider community. In particular this paper I will focus on social movement interactions with the state/political system. This focus on the state may be criticised for ignoring movements' consciousness raising efforts. However it is clear that some of the attention of social movements is aimed at changing public policy and legislation, and these changes require state support to succeed.<sup>11</sup>

### **New actors, new policy, and new meanings**

In this next section I will explore three types of political gains sought by social movements in order to determine where to focus empirical investigations of social movement influence over the political system/state. Mass mobilisations seek three political outcomes:

**Figure 3**

<b>Three forms of political influence</b>
Participatory gains - elite acceptance of new actors
Material gains - elite acceptance of new policy
Discursive gains - elite acceptance of new meanings

Two of the forms of political influence can be found in the work of William Gamson who sees collective action 'success' as a being linked to participatory and material outcomes.<sup>12</sup> The participatory gains would result in the acceptance of social movements into the political decision-making processes as legitimate representatives of previously underrepresented groups of people. In Schumaker's work this is encompassed by the concepts of access responsiveness, that is the willingness of the target to hear the

concerns of the movement organization; and agenda responsiveness, the target's willingness to place the movement's demands on the political agenda.<sup>13</sup> Participatory outcomes may result in the creation of a new agency to provide access to the political realm to actors previously denied involvement in this realm or it could mean the acceptance of social movement actors into public forums and political parties.

There are problems linking social movement influence to success in gaining access to the political system because of the conflict between inclusion and autonomy. Inclusion in existing institutions of democracy changes the very nature of social movements from that of 'outsider' to 'insider' groups. As already noted, social movements are distinct forms of collective action partly due to their use of non-institutional tactics and forms. Once a challenging group is accepted or included in decision-making it is no longer a challenging group.<sup>14</sup> The tension created by inclusion in the political realm is noted by Jamison et al in a study of the environmental movement in Europe:

The movement was subject to the pull of incorporation from other political actors, particularly political parties and other organisations of the established political culture creating a tension between this incorporation and autonomy.<sup>15</sup>

Institutionalisation has been seen as an instrument of social control and inclusion in the political process signals attempts by political elites to co-opt challenging groups. For this reason it seems prudent to leave aside participatory gains as a measure of social movement influence.

The second part of Gamson's measures of success is based on gauging whether movements have gained new advantages for their constituencies.<sup>16</sup> This type of goal can be considered as a substantive aim of social movements. Substantive 'success' involves changes in policies in response to challenge and can either be proactive (implying the introduction of 'new advantages') or it can be reactive (implying prevention of 'new disadvantages').<sup>17</sup> Such gains include legislative and policy changes or redistribution of resources to benefit the social movement constituency. Material gains are also discussed by Schumaker who notes that success may be measured against policy responsiveness, the target's adoption of new policies (particularly legislation) congruent with the manifest demands of protest groups; output responsiveness, the target's effective implementation of its new policies; and impact responsiveness, the degree to which the actions of the political system succeed in alleviating the grievances of the protest group.<sup>18</sup>

There are problems with using substantive gains as the only measure of social movement influence. First, investigation of social movement influence can easily miss subtle or unintended changes brought about by social movements.<sup>19</sup> Second, investigations of material gains would be time consuming as social movement actors seek dozens of different substantive changes over time. Social movements are not coherent institutions focused on a single material goal, they are a collection of actors and groups sharing a common identity but with multiple substantive aims. This is evident within the women's movement where actors may share a common identity based on a desire to improve the lives of women, but disagree on how improvements will be brought about. For example, some activists in the women's movement see child care as essential to improving

women's lives, while others claim improvements will be achieved through motherhood payments which allow women to stay in the home and care for their children.

The third gain sought by social movements and discussed in existing sociology and political science literature is discursive advantage. Social movements are not just fighting for increased participation in decision-making, nor for material gains, they are fighting for different meanings and orientations to be adopted by society. The discursive impact of social movements is often investigated in terms of the impact of movement 'frames' on individuals taking a part in the mass mobilisation.<sup>20</sup> Understanding the concept of framing as a way to convince individuals to participate in social protest is in part tied to the origins of the concept. Social movement literature has based its concept on the work of Erving Goffman who used framing to explain the actions of individuals not groups in society.<sup>21</sup> A focus on changes to the narratives used by individual citizens participating in social movement activity does not provide insight into the influence of the phenomenon over political decision-making. What is needed is to take a wider view of the role of frames in social movement action.

Social movements are involved in battles for cognitive space, fights for cultural stakes and for different meanings to be adopted. In this sense social movements attempt to change the frames of politicians, bureaucrats, the media, and members of the public not just those of social movement activists and potential activists. Zald acknowledges that competitive examination of the impact and outcomes of movements on culture and frames, as well as on policy, would be extraordinarily valuable. When and how movements' add to or change the cultural stock are important dimensions in understanding social change in general.<sup>22</sup> There have been limited attempts to show the impact of social movements on public discourses. For example, Myra Marx Ferree used a concept of success based on changes in the collective consciousness in three arenas: political and policy outcomes, mobilisation outcomes, and cultural outcomes.<sup>23</sup> While Barbara Hobson looked at the way women's collectives in Scandinavia and Sweden impacted upon discourse.<sup>24</sup> Looking at discursive impact of social movements does tie in with the definition of movements as discursive actors using unconventional tactics to bring about social change and it is a plausible goal against which to measure the influence of mass mobilisations in democratic decision-making.

A focus on language does not discount the other gains sought by social movements – participatory and material gains – but can in part encompass both. Social movement actors incorporated into the formal political structures of a democracy may assist in attempts to change the dominant discourses by helping to transfer social movement knowledge into this realm. An investigation of discursive influence may help to highlight the role of these boundary-spanning actors in decision-making. An investigation of discursive influence may also locate instances of material gain, as many of these gains will be found in the narratives of legislation and other written policy documents.

The assertion that it is possible to measure the discursive influence of social movements raises a methodological problem; How to show that the actions of the social movement caused the change in the political arena? This is a well-known problem in social science,

the existence of such a close relationship between a set of variables that it is hard to identify cause and effect.<sup>25</sup> One solution to the problem of causality is offered by Hanspeter Kriesi:

We have to make the link between the movement's action and the observed change indirectly, by specifying the mechanisms through which the former produces the latter."<sup>26</sup>

In the case of discursive impact it is the very process of public debate that provides the mechanisms through which collectives assert discursive influence. It is the interaction between multiple actors in the decision making process that provides a way in which social movements can change the frames of other actors in the policy realm. Policy formation is not a one way street, it is an interaction and policy oriented learning is seen as the motor of change in public policy.<sup>27</sup> This interaction does not have to be on a face to face basis. As Dryzek notes communicative power is diffuse and pervasive, felt in the way terms are defined and issues are framed, not in the direct leverage of one actor over another.<sup>28</sup>

Earlier I discounted investigations of participatory gains by social movements due to the fear that formal inclusion of mass mobilisations within decision-making bodies may signal state co-option of the challenging group rather than genuine influence. It is important to look at whether discourses, as well as political actors, can be co-opted by the existing political elites in attempts to prevent further disruptive action. In social movement literature the generation of discourses is seen as a strategic effort by groups of people to fashion understandings of the world and themselves, as well as an effort to legitimate and motivate collective action.<sup>29</sup> If social movement actors are able to use frames strategically, then it is possible for political elites to practice discursive co-option. However framing is not only a conscious action, it is also a subconscious activity. As Goffman asserts individuals apply frames automatically and are unaware of the organised features of the frameworks they applied to situations.

It seems we can hardly glance at anything without applying a primary framework, thereby forming conjectures about what occurred before and the expectation of what is likely to happen now.<sup>30</sup>

Frames exert powerful influence over what we see and how we interpret what we see, they belong to the taken-for-granted world of policy making, we are usually unaware of their role in organising our actions, thoughts, and perceptions.<sup>31</sup> Any methodology used to measure discursive influence must be able to detect strategic use of language by all political actors, as well as the unconsciously applied primary frames within narratives. I will address this issue later in the paper, by looking at ways to categorise deconstructed texts which draw out the layers of frames used by political actors.

As long as the issue of discursive co-option is kept in mind during the development of a methodology, it is clear that focusing on social movement influence over public policy discourse provides a way forward in measuring social movement impact. Such a focus implies that language can shape the world. While I do not believe that language is all there is, I agree with Yee that languages restrict or authorise, priorities and distribute the ideas and beliefs that policy makers can think and in doing so partly delimit policies they can pursue.<sup>32</sup> For example, labelling an item on the political agenda as being a public or

private matter results in private issues being left outside the realm of public accountability.<sup>33</sup> Social movements can bring about change in the world by altering the language used in the political realm. As Melucci notes conflict in society assumes the form of a symbolic challenges that publicise novel dilemmas and problems and this leads to the generations of new definitions of freedom and the recognition of new rights and responsibilities.<sup>34</sup>

This paper now turns to develop a methodology that allows attention to be focussed on the process of policy making as a discursive struggle to name problems and solutions. Any such methodology must find a way to draw out the different discourses used in the policy debates and the social practices under which those frames are constructed and changed.

### **Coalitions, discourses, and change**

One tool already used to measure the discursive impact of social movements within public policy debates is the advocacy coalition framework of Paul Sabatier.<sup>35</sup> As described by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith the advocacy coalition framework requires a perspective of at least ten years, a focus on policy subsystems, an intergovernmental dimension and the conceptualisation of public policy based upon a belief system capable of establishing value priorities and causal assumptions.<sup>36</sup> The advocacy coalition framework aggregates the multiplicity of actors involved in public policy debates into coalitions based on common beliefs. As Sabatier sees it advocacy coalitions are composed of politicians, agency officials, interest group leaders, and intellectuals who share a set of normative and causal beliefs on policy issues.<sup>37</sup> This aggregation of actors around shared beliefs fits neatly with definitions of social movements as collectives sharing a common cognitive praxis.

The problem with the advocacy coalition framework is that Sabatier asserts that coalitions are groups of people “who show a nontrivial degree of co-ordinated activity over time.”<sup>38</sup> As defined earlier social movements are networks that use non-institutional tactics and forms to bring about social change. It is difficult to show that these non-institutionalised collectives (found between the political and civil realms) have had non-trivial levels of contact with the institutionalised actors responsible for making legislation and public policy. In order to encompass the non-institutional nature of social movements I will turn instead to Maarten Hajer’s concept of discourse coalitions to scrutinise the influence of social movements over public policy narratives. Similar to advocacy coalitions, discourse coalitions are groups of actors who share a social construct, however there is no emphasis on the co-ordinated interaction of those who share a cognitive praxis.<sup>39</sup> This concept of a discourse coalition is useful when looking at the discursive impact of sustained social protests because it fits with the definition of social movements as an aggregation of actors around a social construct. Therefore it will allow identification of any social movements involved in public policy debates, the first step in any attempts to measure social movement influence over public narratives.

An investigation of discourse coalitions would begin with a close analysis of written texts to map out the narratives that exist in a particular area of public policy decision-making.



A discourse is an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to a phenomenon, a story line through which actors make sense of the world. A wide range of texts must be selected for analysis of social movement influence on public policy. Any analysis would require deconstruction of public documents from organisations and actors, such as state agencies, politicians, social movement actors, the media, and counter-movements. Sabatier advocates the use of public documents in order to analyse the coalitions that exist in public policy debates:

Given the rather technical nature of many secondary aspects and the focus on changes in beliefs over a decade or more, content analysis of government documents (e.g., legislative and administrative hearings) and interest-group publication probably offer the best prospects for systematic empirical work on changes in elite beliefs.<sup>40</sup>

Not only must the documents used for the close analysis come from a wide range of sources, they must cover a wide time frame. Any discursive changes that occur in public policy are likely to evolve slowly and as such, investigations of such shifts must cover at least ten years. The first reading of these written texts would involve an examination of the detailed phrases and words within which researchers must look for: Common textual patterns and features; Common assumptions; Common character representations; and common ways of using conventional resources.<sup>41</sup>

The deconstruction of texts allows researchers to map the various discourses found in a public policy debate but it will not identify whether a social movement discourse coalition existed or whether this coalition influenced the dominant narratives of the political system/state. As Hajer notes the analysis must go beyond investigation of differences of opinion of technical facts and must look at the social practices from which social constructs emerge and in which the actors that make these statements engage.<sup>42</sup> Implicit in social movement literature is the idea that many public policy disputes involve a discourse adhered to by a social movement, as well as a dominant discourse with a set of beliefs to which the actors of the mass mobilisation are opposed. Social movements are seen to raise cultural challenges to the dominant language, to the codes that organise information and shape social practices.<sup>43</sup> Before looking for any influence by social movements on the discourse of the political system/state we need to identify if a social movement discourse coalition exists. To locate the discourse coalitions that exist within the political debates, the documents will be reread and actors grouped together in coalitions according to their use of common discursive traits.

The next step is to investigate whether social movement discourses were adopted by other political actors, such as those involved in state agencies, the media, academia, and the general population. In order to find out if a social movement discourse coalition has been influential over other discourse coalitions researchers must look for changes in the composition of the coalitions and also look to see which of the narratives is 'institutionalised' by actors of the political system/state. Hajer argues that the key to success is the ability of discourse coalitions to imbed their linguistic categories in the structure of the methodologies and practices that shape and guide everyday policy deliberation.<sup>44</sup> Institutionalisation may be a durable resource for social movements as it protects gains.<sup>45</sup> Influence by social movements will be evident if other political actors

(particularly actors from within the existing political system/state) join the discourse coalition of the mass mobilisation.

Social movements may have institutional actors picking up their narratives but does this mean real discursive influence? As noted earlier actors can use frames strategically, and it is possible that social movement discourses will be adopted by state actors in an attempt to shut down any challenges to the status quo and not to bring real change. In order to try to detect this discursive co-option I will draw on concepts from Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework. Sabatier asserts that some aspects of public policy clearly change far more frequently than others. To get a conceptual handle of this Sabatier divides policy into three belief systems – core, public, and secondary aspect beliefs.<sup>46</sup> The first category is deep core beliefs. These are the normative concepts or worldviews found in the cognitive praxes of each coalition. The second, policy core beliefs are those ideas which are central to the policy views, such as who is responsible for childcare and why childcare is necessary. The final category is that of secondary aspects of public policy. These are the beliefs on how the policies surrounding childcare should be implemented. In particular it is the division between core and policy beliefs that will be useful when trying to gauge the influence of social movements. The most desirable discursive influence for mass mobilisations would be the adoption of the movements core beliefs by other actors. I will now turn to two case studies in order to test the theory and methodology set out in this paper. The cases focus on the influence of the women's movement in two areas of public debate in New Zealand.

### **The women's movement in action in New Zealand**

The first of the case studies looks at the involvement of the New Zealand women's movement in debates over childcare from 1970 to 1999.<sup>47</sup> This issue was chosen as the public debates have involved both members of women's organisations and actors from the state/political system. For example the concern over childcare can be found in a Parliamentary Select Committee Submission made by the National Organisation of Women in 1990:

Career choices, childcare, and women's education have all been addressed by the Council at various times and in various forums. No one of these measures is sufficient in itself. But each has its place if all New Zealanders are to have the opportunity for full and free development.<sup>48</sup>

State actors were involved in monitoring the quality of day-care through child care centre regulations, as well as the provision funding for capital works, staff training, and subsidies for parents using carers outside the home.

The second case centres on the measurement and valuation of unpaid work, that is all services and productive activities outside the formal economy that could have been done by a third person without changing their utility to members of the household.<sup>49</sup> This definition of unpaid work excludes tasks performed voluntarily for charities, clubs, and other organisations. As with debates on child care, unpaid work was chosen for analysis as the topic has been debated by both members of women's organisations and state actors over the past 30 years:

All feminist theory has identified the crucial role of women's unpaid labour in the household and, to a lesser extent, in the community. (p. 13 NZUPW 22)

This government has a strong commitment to valuing women's unpaid work and this has been clearly recognised in a number of policy initiatives, perhaps most notably in the area of early childhood care and education and the policy direction taken on the issue of superannuation.<sup>50</sup>

The choice of unpaid work in an investigation of the discursive impact of the women's movement is prudent as it is predominantly a battle over definitions and narratives.

In order to establish what discourses were used in New Zealand childcare and unpaid work debates, I carried out a close analysis of 181 public documents on childcare and 110 documents on the measurement of unpaid productive activity. While the documents chosen are by no means an exhaustive set of documents on childcare and unpaid work in New Zealand, they included government reports, press releases, women's organisation newsletters, Hansard Parliamentary Debates, submission to Select Committees, presentations to public forums, academic papers, and reports from State Agencies and Government Departments. Also examined were selections taken at three-year intervals from Hansard Parliamentary Debates and the New Zealand feminist magazine "Broadsheet". As noted earlier, any close analysis aimed at tracing the coalitions that exist in public policy debates must cover a wide time frame (one of at least a decade) and multiple sources.

### **Feminists debate child care and unpaid work**

The first step was to locate whether there was an identifiable feminist discourse in debates on child care and unpaid work in New Zealand between 1970 and 1999. In terms of the child care discussions, a feminist discourse was particularly evident in documentation of the 1970s and centred on the provision of free 24-hour childcare so women could work, rest, and play unencumbered by children.

### **Figure 4**

#### **Women have a right to equality: Feminism and Child Care**

##### *Deep Core*

Women have a right to equality in both the public and private spheres. Motherhood is socially constructed. Women are oppressed by cultural and social conventions.

##### *Policy Core*

Parents should have access to free 24-hour childcare. Childcare is needed so women can work, rest, study, and play. The community has a responsibility to care for children. The Government has an active role to play in providing real choice for women. There should be more sharing of childcare duties between men and women.

In terms of unpaid work a broad feminist discourse was evident throughout the 30 years of debates scrutinised. This feminist discourse contained assumptions about the value of unpaid work and its status as 'productive activity'.

We believe it has become an obvious and well-known fact that in our society the job of childrearing and caring for the home has a very low rating both socially and economically.<sup>51</sup>

Women are assumed to undertake the duties of domestic worker, unpaid of course. If women did not perform these duties, real wages would have to rise to allow for the purchase of these services or employers would have to supply them, with resulting loss of profits.<sup>52</sup>

### Figure 5

#### **Every woman is a working woman: Feminism and Unpaid Work**

##### *Deep Core*

Women have a right to choice. The world is patriarchally dominated. Work is any productive activity.

##### *Policy Core*

Unpaid work must be assigned monetary value and statistical significance. Women must be paid for unpaid work so they can have real choices in life. The opposite of paid employment is unpaid work.

The existence of these feminist discourses does not confirm that the women's movement was active in New Zealand during the three decades of public deliberations being investigated. While a common cognitive praxis is part of what makes a social movement, the groups involved in the collective must use unconventional forms of action or structures at least some of the time in their attempts to bring social change. In this respect it was necessary to look at the discourse coalitions that formed around the feminist discourses. This involved mapping out which actors in New Zealand used the two feminist frames found in debates on child care and unpaid work. In terms of child care it was clear that actors from groups which used unconventional action and structures were the main proponents of the feminist discourse in the 1970s. Included in a list of 17 organisation who were part of the feminist discourse coalition were Women's Liberation organisations, the United Women's Convention, the Working Women's Council, the Society for Research on Women, and the Women's Electoral Lobby. While these groups varied in the extent of their institutional organisation and actions, many had unconventional grass roots structures and used non-institutional tactics to push for social change. In the debates on the measurement of unpaid work similar organisations involved in the feminist discourse coalition. In the 1970s debates over the valuation of unpaid productive activity there were 14 different groups were involved in the feminist discourse coalition. Included in this coalition were the National Organisation of Women, the Society for Research on Women, the United Women's Convention, Broadsheet contributors, and the Federation of University Women. Again many of these women's organisations used tactics such as demonstrations and rallies to push for social change, and were organisations with unconventional structures and methods of operation.

So using a discourse coalition approach allowed identification of the women's movement in debates of child care and unpaid work in New Zealand, but can it show whether this movement was influential in the public policy debates. Gaining a view of the influence of the women's movement must start with an investigation highlighting the other actors involved in the feminist discourse coalitions between 1970 and 1999. Hajer's argument is that success for a social movement would be the institutionalising of their narratives. Influence by the women's movement would see members of mainstream state institutions joining the feminist discourse coalitions found in unpaid work and child care debates.

### **Marginalising women's issues**

An analysis of the core and policy beliefs about childcare in New Zealand between 1970 and 1999 showed the use of feminist frames by a very small number of women MPs, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and a few individual bureaucrats. But there is no evidence of large scale involvement in the feminist discourse coalition by government ministers or state agencies. As central government controls policy making on childcare in New Zealand, the virtual absence of its key actors from the women's movement discourse coalition meant the feminist core beliefs lack real power between 1970 and 1999. This lack of acceptance of the feminist narratives is discussed by Helen Cook:

The lack of acceptance of core feminist frames by the state in New Zealand may be due to the strength of narratives on motherhood and gender roles. The politics of childcare is ultimately caught in debates focussing on what people believe the roles of men and women should be.<sup>53</sup>

Similarly with the unpaid work debates, the feminist discourse coalition did not include large numbers of government actors and bureaucrats. Of state agencies, it is really only the Ministry of Women's Affairs that throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s used the feminist narratives in debates about the measurement and valuation of unpaid household duties. The Ministry of Women's Affairs notes the lack of support from other government departments, when it was unable to secure funding from other agencies to carry out time use surveys.<sup>54</sup>

While the Ministry is a state agency its position is somewhat different from other state actors, as it was established in 1984 as a state advocate of women's needs.<sup>55</sup> The fact that it is the Ministry of Women's Affairs which takes a place in the feminist discourse coalition along side women's movement activists is in this respect not surprising, nor evidence of wider state/ political system acceptance of feminist narratives. In fact I would argue that leaving this topic with the Ministry of Women's Affairs means valuation of unpaid work and child care is seen as a 'women's issue' only and not part of mainstream policy making.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs was part of the feminist discourse coalition during the early discussion of both child care and unpaid work but this involvement with women's movement coalition wanes in the case of child care deliberations. In discussions on child care from 1970 to 1999, the Ministry of Women's Affairs is involved in three different discourse coalitions found within the documents analysed. As already noted the Ministry

involves itself in the feminist discourse coalition in the years immediately following its inception. By the late 1980s the Ministry is arguing childcare is needed to protect children's rights and is relatively silent on women's rights. Then in the 1990s the Ministry sees child care as essential to protect all workers' rights. The Ministry staff may have deliberately chosen to shift into the child and worker rights discourse coalitions, but tracing the motives for such action would require interviews with Ministry staff and is outside the scope of this paper. The difference between the discourses used by the Ministry of Women's Affairs when child care and unpaid work deliberations are investigated side by side may in part lie with the different nature of the policy debates analysed. Child care involves the redistribution of goods, while unpaid work is a discursive and non-distributive debate.

While the women's movement did not have power over the majority of state actors in child care and unpaid work deliberations, it was not totally powerless either. During the 30 years studied there was evidence of feminist discourses on child care and unpaid work being adopted by unions, sector groups and academics.<sup>56</sup> The close analysis of public texts on child care showed no involvement by unions and sector groups in the feminist discourse coalition in the 1970s. Then from 1979 unions and sector groups taking part in the debates on child care joined the feminist discourse coalition. Similarly in debates on unpaid work, women's movement activists dominate the feminist discourse coalition in the 1970s, but during the 1980s and 1990s academics and a small number of unions join this coalition. A network analysis tracing the movement of individual feminist women's might show that it was the involvement of individual feminists in unions and academic that brought about the movement of these organisations into the feminist discourse coalitions. However, such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper.

The lack of social movement influence over the core beliefs of actors from the state/political system is in part predicted within Sabatier's work on advocacy coalitions. Sabatier and Mazmanian note that changes to core beliefs are considered extremely difficult to achieve, with any adaptation seen as being "akin to a religious conversion".<sup>57</sup> However Sabatier and Mazmanian's assertions only hold when looking for changes in beliefs in line with the narratives of the women's movement. For the core and policy beliefs of the actors involved in child care and unpaid work debates were not static between 1970 and 1999. A number of changes in discourse coalitions were detected in the close analysis of child care and unpaid work debates. The first step is to locate the other discourses that were part of these deliberations, and then to look at the membership of the coalitions that used each or the core and policy beliefs.

### **Patriarchy, rights, and neo-liberalism**

If social movement literature is correct, then the existence of a discourse coalition dominated by women's movement organisations will signal the existence of a dominant discourse coalition to which the feminists were opposed. Discourses centred on patriarchal beliefs were found to be part of the New Zealand debates of childcare and unpaid work between 1970 and 1999. In the child care debates the patriarchal discourse saw care by mothers as being the most 'natural' and 'normal'<sup>58</sup> and day-care outside the home was applicable only for those families with special needs. As the Department of

Labour notes in 1987 childcare was allowed for sick mothers, solo mothers, and families where women worked due to financial pressures on the family.<sup>59</sup>

#### Figure 6

##### **Women are natural carers: Patriarchy and Child Care**

###### *Deep Core*

Nuclear families are essential for society. Childcare is not suitable for pre-schoolers. A good mother cares for her own children. Women are natural carers.

###### *Policy Core*

Women only work outside the home due to economic necessity. Childcare is a welfare issue and care outside the home should only be provided in cases of extreme need. A lack of mother-care for young children results in social problems later.

In unpaid work debates it is clear that the status quo found in documents of the 1970s was a patriarchal discourse in which work was seen as paid employment and household chores were part of the private realm that did not require public reward or recognition. In early census documents adult males would be 'gainfully employed' while claiming 'my wife doesn't work'.

#### Figure 7

##### **Male breadwinner/female homemaker: Patriarchy and Unpaid Work**

###### *Deep Core*

Work is paid employment. A woman's place is in the home. Household chores are a responsibility (not work).

###### *Policy Core*

Women perform an important function in the home. Money should be given to married couples to ensure women can stay at home. The opposite of work is leisure.

Beyond the 1970s relatively few actors are involved in the two patriarchal discourse coalitions. In child care debates of the 1980s there was evidence that actors were moving away from the belief that a woman's place is in the home and by the 1990s no actors used the patriarchal core beliefs in debates on childcare. However some of the patriarchal beliefs did filter into the social construction at the centre of the third discourse coalition detected in New Zealand debates of childcare between 1970 and 1999 – the child rights discourse.

#### Figure 8

##### **Children must be well cared for and education: Child Rights and Child Care**

###### *Deep Core*

Children have a right to quality care. Children have a right to quality education. Childcare is about protecting the welfare of children.

###### *Policy Core*

Childcare is about education of young children. Childcare must care for the minds of children. The state should regulate the operation of childcare centres. Children deserve quality care no matter what the financial position of their parents.

There were two parts to their child-centred discourse, a concern for the welfare of children and a desire to provide better education standards. These two were intertwined from 1978 to 1987 in New Zealand with the concept of ‘educare’ that dominates the discourses of state agencies and government departments. While children’s rights dominated this child-centred narratives, it is a pragmatic approach to the existence of ‘working-women’ that was central to the fourth discourse found in debates on childcare.

### Figure 9

#### **Working Parents Need Support: Workers Rights and Child Care**

##### *Deep Core*

Childcare is a right for all working parents. Paid employment is a right for all New Zealanders.

##### *Policy Core*

Employers and the state have a role to play in providing childcare. Solo parents have to return to the workforce for economic survival. Childcare funding should be provided for all working parents.

The final storyline found in New Zealand childcare debates from 1970 to 1999 was the neo-liberal discourse that appeared towards the end of the 1980s. The neo-liberal social construct was based on a belief that individuals have an obligation to work and provide adequate care for their own families.

### Figure 10

#### **Individuals must care for their own families: Neo-liberals and Child Care**

##### *Deep Core*

New Zealanders have an obligation to provide for their own well being. Parents are responsible for the care and education of their children.

##### *Policy Core*

The market will provide childcare facilities if there is a demonstrated need. Employees should negotiate childcare as part of their employment contracts. Cost-benefit analyses should be applied to childcare facilities. Parents should be provided with the tools to care for their own children.

A discourse based on neo-liberal beliefs is also evident in debates about the valuation of unpaid work between 1970 and 1999. While actors who used the neo-liberal discourse in unpaid work debates admitted that “activities” go on outside the labour force, the underlying assumption is constant – work is paid employment, everything else was “not work”.

- How many hours did you work last week?

**Do not include** any unpaid work you did other than that in a family business.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 11**

**All adults should part in paid employment: Neoliberals and Unpaid Work**

*Deep Core*

Working is the normal state for all adults. Work is paid employment.

*Policy Core*

Voluntary labour is a step towards paid employment. Women should be in the labour force, except when caring for young children. Unpaid work should not be part of mainstream statistics.

As noted earlier it is necessary to map out which actors adhered to the various discourses in order to establish the coalitions involved in child care and unpaid work deliberations. Dominant discourse coalitions would be those in which the narratives were institutionalised in laws or other state/political system texts. In the case of child care discussions, state actors were found predominantly in the child rights discourse coalition during the late 1970s. Then in the 1980s its is narratives on workers rights which dominate narratives of the state/political system. From 1988 in New Zealand debates on childcare it was the neo-liberal core beliefs that dominated the texts produced by state actors.<sup>61</sup> This move to a neo-liberal values system is also evident in debates on unpaid work. So while Sabatier and Mazmanian may claim that changes in core beliefs are ‘akin to religious conversion’ it is clear that state agents did change their beliefs and move into new discourse coalitions in deliberations about child care and unpaid work in New Zealand.

**Conclusion**

A discourse analysis of public text and a focus on the discourse coalitions involved in the generation of narratives allows researchers to investigate the influence (or lack of influence) of social movements. As I have demonstrated by looking at two case studies in New Zealand, it is possible to establish whether a social movement discourse coalition exists in areas of public policy and whether this coalition contains actors from the state/political system. What was clear in the two case studies was that the feminist discourse coalitions failed to attract into their ranks large numbers of institutional actors, the one exception was involvement by the boundary-spanning Ministry of Women’s Affairs. It was other discourse coalitions found within the debates of child care and unpaid work that were ‘institutionalised’ by the involvement of actors from the existing state/political system.

There are two possible explanations for the lack of influence by the feminist discourse coalitions, while other coalitions fared better. The first of these centres on the path-dependency of public policy narratives. In debates on child care, both the neo-liberal and child rights discourse coalitions contained beliefs that shifted only marginally from the patriarchal narrative which dominated state documents in the early 1970s. The child rights and patriarchal narratives both held core beliefs about protecting the welfare of children, while the patriarchal and neo-liberal narratives both contained beliefs about the importance of the family unit. While parts of the child-centred and neo-liberal frames can

be seen as extensions of the core and policy beliefs found within the patriarchal discourse coalition of the 1970s, the feminist frames called for a radical departure from the dominant core beliefs espoused by state actors in the 1970s. What may have happened in the public policy debates of child care in New Zealand is a frame alignment exercise in which new beliefs were moulded to fit the existing dominant frame.

In the debates on unpaid work, path dependence was certainly evident in the view of statistics that dominated state agencies. Statistics New Zealand continually referred to statistics as facts that had to be verifiable and comparable. This view of statistics meant there could be little change in the questions asked from one survey to the next. Phillip S. Morrison notes that in order to study change social sciences need an instrument which does not change, and instrument such as a questionnaire which asked the same questions in the same way over a broad time span.

Yet, this very stability in questionnaire required to measure change is often neither desirable nor possible. Questions must change in order to be relevant, and relevance implies adaptation to the very changes that the data is trying to capture.<sup>62</sup>

Another reason for the attraction of politicians and bureaucrats to the child rights and neo-liberal discourse coalitions rather than feminist coalitions, may have been the power of the other members of the coalitions. In child care debates the child rights discourse coalition (which was strong during the late 1970s and much of the 1980s) was made up of 'experts' from unions, sector groups, and a number of government departments. The feminist discourse coalition at the time was made up of 'outsider' groups rarely seen as experts on childcare. In debates on both child care and the valuation of unpaid work the neo-liberal discourse coalition proved popular with state actors in the 1990s and was pushed by powerful business elites. These groups may have simply had more power than the women's movement in the bid to change the cultural stock used in debates on child care and unpaid work.

Further comparative work would allow for additional conclusions to be drawn about the conditions under which social movements were able to encourage other political actors to join the discourse coalition founded by the movement. We should continue to look for the conditions under which organisations achieve discursive influence. After all if social movements are an alternative way that the public presents its views to decision makers, it is important to understand when and how mobilisations exert influence over public policy decisions.

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