

## Master Frames and Cycles of Protest

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The notion that social movements hang together or cluster in some fashion is a relatively old one in the literature. The concept of general social movement, initially coined by Blumer (1951; cf. Turner and Killian 1987), suggests that specific movements within any historical era are tributaries of a more general stream of agitation. Klapp similarly points to this clustering tendency in his aptly titled *Currents of Unrest* (1972) in which he suggests the applicability of the general systems concept of "oscillation" to the analysis of collective behavior. More recently, McCarthy and Zald's (1977) concepts of "social movement organizations, industries, and sectors" provide a conceptual basis for the temporal and spatial clustering of movement activity. And the concept of "cycles of protest," elaborated by Tarrow (1983), underscores even more concretely the clustering and sequencing of collective action. Taken together these concepts and ideas bear a striking "family resemblance" (Wittgenstein 1967) in that they all direct attention first to the ecological and cyclical aggregation of social movements and, second, to the embeddedness of social movement organizations (SMOs) in a particular cycle or sector of movement activity.

That movement organizations and activities do indeed cluster temporally in a cyclical fashion not only is a topic of theoretical speculation but is also well documented, as evidenced by several recent empirical investigations of collective action in Western Europe (della Porta and Tarrow 1986; Shorter and Tilly 1974; Tarrow 1983; Tilly et al. 1975; Tilly 1978). Similarly, the rise and decline of collective violence in American cities during

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the 1960s and early 1970s, the sudden flowering and subsequent wilting of religious cults in the late 1960s and 1970s, and the recent eruption of collective action throughout much of Eastern Europe illustrate this cyclical pattern.

But what accounts for this clustering and apparent connection among movements within a cycle seems to be less well understood. Early collective behavior theory suggested contagion and convergence processes as possible explanatory mechanisms, but research during the past fifteen years has found that such processes tend to shroud rather than illuminate the dynamics of collective action. The more recent resource mobilization perspective focuses attention on changes in various structural factors such as social networks (Snow et al. 1980), indigenous organizational strengths (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984), the structure of political opportunities (Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Lipsky 1970), and resource pools (McCarthy and Zald 1977) as the key explanatory mechanisms that affect the waxing and waning of social movements. Although such variables are no doubt crucial to understanding the clustering of collective action, the factors that account for those changes are not unambiguously specified. Nor do purely structural explanations suffice in accounting for periodic shifts in the level of social movement activity. Why, for example, do citizens sometimes fail to act collectively on their shared grievances when the structural conditions appear otherwise ripe?

Thus, from our vantage point, two central questions are particularly problematic: first, what accounts for the temporal clustering of smos and activities, and second, what accounts for the cyclicity of social movement activity? We seek to advance understanding of these issues by examining theoretically the relation between cycles of protest and what we refer to as master frames. More specifically, we will elaborate and explore a number of sensitizing propositions regarding this hypothesized linkage.

We see this exercise as essentially theoretic. Our aim is not to demonstrate empirically or to verify the propositions we elaborate but to develop a framework for conceptualizing and discussing the relation between master frames and cycles of protest. This endeavor builds on and extends our earlier work on frame alignment (Snow et al. 1986) and frame resonance (Snow and Benford 1988) in two ways: it provides conceptual clarification, and it extends our analyses from the microlevel to the macrolevel. Whereas we focused before on the framing activity of individual movement organizations, here we turn to an examination of how frames function in a larger context.<sup>1</sup>

1. In attempting to illuminate the relation between master frames and cycles of protest, we focus almost exclusively on interpretive factors to the neglect of other vari-

Since our inquiry places a premium on ideational factors, we begin with a brief overview of their treatment in the literature. Next, we elaborate the characteristic features of collective action frames and then discuss master frames and cycles of protest, the two key concepts that are the focus of our inquiry. And finally, we discuss a number of sensitizing propositions regarding the relation among master frames, cycles of protest, and specific movements within these cycles.

## THEORETICAL ISSUES AND CONCEPTS

### Ideology, Signification, and Framing

References to ideology and its elements—values, beliefs, meanings—are commonplace in the social movement literature. The treatment of ideological factors in relation to the course and character of movements has been far from satisfactory, however. A survey of discussions of ideology in the literature suggests that the concept has been dealt with in essentially two ways. Before the emergence of the resource mobilization perspective, writers (with the exception of Turner and Killian 1987; Turner 1969) treated ideology primarily descriptively rather than analytically, and statically rather than dynamically. Some recognized its role in the social movement process, but their discussion of it seldom went beyond enumerating its functions and content, treating the latter as if it flowed almost naturally or magically from the movement's underlying strains. Descriptive or movement ideology was seen as prefatory to the more important analytic task of ferreting out the relation between movement emergence and "structural strain" (e.g., see Smelser 1963).

Since the displacement of strain theory by resource mobilization perspectives in the mid-1970s, ideological factors have figured even less prominently in movement analyses. Indeed, the tendency has been to ignore or gloss over mobilizing beliefs and ideas in large part because of their presumed ubiquity and constancy, which make them, in turn, relatively nonproblematic and uninteresting factors in the movement equation (Oberschall 1973, 133–34, 194–95; McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1214–15; Jenkins and Perrow 1977, 250–51; Jenkins 1983, 528). A number of critics have recently noted this oversight and have called for a broadening

ables such as social structure. This does not mean that we regard the latter as unimportant, nor do we seek to supplant structural explanations with an ideational framework. Rather, our purpose is to augment structuralist perspectives by calling attention to a set of heretofore neglected factors we see as crucial to developing a more thoroughgoing understanding of the ecological and temporal clustering of social movement activity.

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of resource mobilization theory to include ideational factors (Ferree and Miller 1985; Gamson et al. 1982; Zurcher and Snow 1981).

Whether mobilizing ideas and meanings are treated merely descriptively or as nonproblematic constants, both tendencies strike us as misguided on two accounts. First, meanings and ideas are treated as given, as if they spring almost immanently from the events and objects with which they are associated, rather than as social productions that arise during the course of interactive processes. And second, they ignore the extent to which movements are engaged in "meaning-work"—that is, in the struggle over the production of ideas of meanings.

In the course of our fieldwork experiences with a variety of social movements (e.g., Nichiren Shoshu, Hare Krishna, the peace movement, and several urban neighborhood movements), we came to see this neglected aspect of movements as particularly interesting and also as problematic. From our vantage point, then, we do not view social movements merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that stand in isomorphic relationship to structural arrangements or unanticipated events. Rather, we see movement organizations and actors as actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers. This productive work may involve the amplification and extension of extant meanings, the transformation of old meanings, and the generation of new meanings (Snow et al. 1986). We thus view movements as functioning in part as signifying agents that often are deeply embroiled, along with the media, local governments, and the state, in what has been referred to aptly as the "politics of signification" (Hall 1982).

It is this signifying work that is the heart of this chapter. Consistent with our earlier work, we conceptualize this signifying work with the verb *framing*, which denotes an active, process-derived phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction. We refer to the products of this framing activity as collective action frames.

### Characteristic Features of Collective Action Frames

The concept of frame has meaning in both everyday and academic discourse. Regarding the latter, its usage is neither discipline-specific nor particularly novel. It not only has found its way into sociology, primarily through the work of Goffman (1974), but has also been used in psychiatry (Bateson 1972), the humanities (Cone 1968), and cognitive psychology (Minsky 1975; Piaget 1954). In addition, the kindred concept of schema has been used widely and has generated considerable research in cognitive psychology (Hastie 1981; Kelley 1972; Marcus and Zajonc 1985; Neisser 1976). Throughout these works the basic referent for the concept

of frame is essentially the same: it refers to an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the "world out there" by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment. In Goffman's words, frames allow individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events within their life space or the world at large (1974, 21). The recent spate of research on the media and newsmaking both documents and highlights this characteristic function of frames (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978). Collective action frames not only perform this focusing and punctuating role; they also function simultaneously as modes of attribution and articulation.

To consider first the punctuating function, collective action frames serve as accenting devices that either underscore and embellish the seriousness and injustice of a social condition or redefine as unjust and immoral what was previously seen as unfortunate but perhaps tolerable. In either case, activists employ collective action frames to punctuate or single out some existing social condition or aspect of life and define it as unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action (Gamson et al. 1982; Klandermans 1984; McAdam 1982; Moore 1978; Piven and Cloward 1977; Snow et al. 1986; Turner and Killian 1987). But the framing of a condition, happening, or sequence of events as unjust, inexcusable, or immoral is not sufficient to predict the direction and nature of collective action. Some sense of blame or causality must be specified as well as a corresponding sense of responsibility for corrective action.

This, then, takes us to the second characteristic of collective action frames: they function as modes of attribution by making diagnostic and prognostic attributions.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the former, movement activists attribute blame for some problematic condition by identifying culpable agents, be they individuals or collective processes or structures. And in the case of prognostic attribution, the Leninesque question is addressed by suggesting both a general line of action for ameliorating the problem and the assignment of responsibility for carrying out that action. Thus, diagnostic attribution is concerned with problem identification, whereas prognostic attribution addresses problem resolution.

In addition to their punctuational and attributional functions, collective action frames enable activists to articulate and align a vast array of

2. Our discussion is informed by the extensive literature in social psychology on attribution theory (Crittenden 1983; Hastie 1984; Heider 1958; Jones et al. 1972; Jones and Nisbett 1974; Kelley 1967, 1971, 1972; Kelley and Michela 1980; Stryker and Gouliel 1981) as well as by the application of attribution theory to social movement conversion processes and experiences (Snow and Machalek 1983, 1984).

events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and meaningful fashion. They are signaling and collating devices that decode and package in Gamson's terms (1988) slices of observed and experienced reality so that subsequent experiences or events need not be interpreted anew. The punctuated and encoded threads of information may be diverse and even incongruous, but they are woven together in such a way that what was previously inconceivable, or at least not clearly articulated, is now meaningfully interconnected. Thus, what gives a collective action frame its novelty is not so much its innovative ideational elements as the manner in which activists articulate or tie them together.

#### Master Frames and Their Variable Features

What we call master frames perform the same functions as movement-specific collective action frames, but they do so on a larger scale. In other words, they are also modes of punctuation, attribution, and articulation, but their punctuations, attributions, articulations may color and constrain those of any number of movement organizations. Master frames are to movement-specific collective action frames as paradigms are to finely tuned theories. Master frames are generic; specific collective action frames are derivative. So conceived, master frames can be construed as functioning in a manner analogous to linguistic codes in that they provide a grammar that punctuates and syntactically connects patterns or happenings in the world. Although all master frames function in this fashion, they can also differ in a number of respects. Three of these variable features warrant attention.

The first stems from the attributional function of master frames. As suggested above, a central feature of the framing process in relation to collective action is the generation of diagnostic attributions, which involve the identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality. All collective action frames perform this diagnostic function, but they can vary considerably in terms of the actual specification of blame. A central finding of attribution theory is that the causes of most behavior are attributed to internal or external factors. We assume that this tendency is also operative in the case of collective action, such that its nature will vary significantly depending on whether blame or responsibility for the problem at hand is internalized.

A central issue in attribution theory has concerned the factors that account for variation in the direction of causal attributions. Among the various factors identified as affecting this process, Kelley's (1972) concept of causal schemata is particularly relevant to our concerns. He argues that causal attributions are circumscribed in part by the general conceptions

people have "about how certain kinds of causes interact to produce a specific kind of effect." In some respects, this argument is similar to Mills's (1940) contention that causal attributions are derived from "vocabularies of motive." Thus, whether using the language of "causal schemata" or "vocabularies of motive," both conceptualizations suggest that causal attributions are not made in a social void but are "framed" instead by attributional algorithms of sorts that can vary situationally and temporally.

Master frames perform a similar function, albeit on a larger scale, in that they provide the interpretive medium through which collective actors associated with different movements within a cycle assign blame for the problem they are attempting to ameliorate. Thus, in the case of SMOs associated with what might be termed the "psychosalvational" frame, such as TM, Scientology, and est, the source of personal suffering and unhappiness is seen as residing within the individual rather than within the larger sociocultural context.<sup>3</sup> That context may be seen as suffocating and decadent, but personal rather than societal transformation is regarded as the key to change. In contrast, from the standpoint of what might be thought of as the civil rights frame, blame is externalized in that unjust differences in life circumstances are attributed to encrusted, discriminatory structural arrangements rather than to the victims' imperfections.

The second variable feature of master frames is rooted in Bernstein's (1970; 1971) idea that there are two basic linguistic codes that yield different patterns of speech and orientation. One is referred to as "the restricted code" and the other as "the elaborated code." In the case of the restricted code, speech is rigidly organized in terms of a narrow range of syntactic alternatives; it is highly particularistic with respect to meaning and social structure, and as a consequence it is more predictable and reflective of the immediate social structure. In contrast, the elaborated code gives rise to speech that is more flexibly organized in terms of a wide range of syntactic alternatives, is more universalistic with respect to meaning and social structure, and thus is less predictable and reflective of immediate structures.

Bernstein's scheme is especially relevant to the articulation function of master frames. We have noted how they function in part as modes of articulation. But not all master frames perform this function in the same fashion. Some are rigid, whereas others are more flexible and elastic. Thus it is useful to distinguish between restricted and elaborated master frames. In idea terms, the former tend to be "closed" or exclusive ideational systems.

3. The term *psychosalvational* was initially used by Wallis (1979) as a cover term for the array of religious and secular movements promising "individual or psycho-spiritual development and self-realization."

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tems that do not so readily lend themselves to amplification or extension. As modes of articulation, they tend to organize a narrow band of ideas in a tightly interconnected fashion; as modes of interpretation, they provide a constricted range of definitions, thus allowing for little interpretive discretion. Stated more parsimoniously, restricted master frames are syntactically rigid and lexically particularistic. The nuclear freeze master frame, as we suggest below, is illustrative of a restricted one.

Elaborated master frames, on the other hand, are organized in terms of a wide range of ideas. They are more flexible modes of interpretation, and as a consequence, they are more inclusive systems that allow for extensive ideational amplification and extension. Being more syntactically flexible and lexically universalistic than the restricted frame, the elaborated master frame allows for numerous aggrieved groups to tap it and elaborate their grievances in terms of its basic problem-solving schema. The civil rights master frame, as we will discuss briefly, is clearly illustrative of an elaborative frame.

The third variable feature of master frames concerns their mobilizing potency. Potency is affected by two factors: where a master frame falls on the restricted/elaborative continuum and the extent of the frame's resonance. Regarding the first factor, we suspect that the more elaborated a master frame, the greater its appeal and influence and the more potent the frame. But potency is not assured by a highly elaborated frame. A master frame may lend itself to elaboration by various aggrieved groups across society, but such extensive elaboration may not be intensive in the sense of striking a deep responsive chord. In other words, its appeal may be only superficial or skin-deep. It follows that the potency of a master frame will also vary with the extent to which it is relevant to or resonates with the life world of adherents and constituents as well as bystanders. Hypothetically, the greater the resonance, the more potent the master frame.

Drawing on our earlier work (Snow and Benford 1988), we suggest three interrelated factors that affect the resonance dimension of potency: empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and ideational centrality or narrative fidelity. By empirical credibility we refer to the apparent evidential basis for a master frame's diagnostic claims. Do its problem designations and attributions appear to be empirically credible from the vantage point of the targets of mobilization? To the extent that there are events that can be interpreted as documentary evidence for diagnostic and prognostic claims, a master frame has empirical credibility.<sup>4</sup>

4. The issue here is not whether diagnostic and prognostic claims are actually factual or valid, but whether their empirical referents lend themselves to being read as

Substantiation of designated problems does not mean that all potential constituents have firsthand experience with these problems. Some individuals may be keenly aware of social arrangements or occurrences punctuated as problematic and unjust, but those problems may be removed from their everyday life situation. For others, the problem may have already intruded into their everyday lives such that they have experienced it directly. When this is the case, the framing has experiential commensurability and, presumably, greater potency.

The final variable affecting a master frame's resonance is its ideational centrality or narrative fidelity. Following Gramsci's (1971) distinction between "organic" and "nonorganic" ideology and Rude's parallel distinction between "inherent" and "derived" ideologies, as well as previous work on belief systems (Borhek and Curtis 1975; Converse 1964), we assume that the more central the ideas and meanings of a proffered framing to the ideology of the targets of mobilization, the greater its hierarchical salience within that larger belief system and the greater its "narrative fidelity" (Fisher 1984). In other words, the frame strikes a responsive chord in that it rings true with extant beliefs, myths, folktales, and the like. When that is the case, we suspect the frame is also considerably more potent.

To summarize, we have suggested that master frames vary in terms of their attributional orientation, their articulation scope, and their potency. Regarding the issue of potency, we postulate that it is a function of a master frame's elaborative potential and its resonance, which, in turn, is affected by the frame's empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity. We suspect that at least one of these resonance variables must be operative if a master frame is to exhibit much potency and that the existence of all three translates into considerable potency.

### Cycles of Protest

We now turn to the final key theoretical element: cycles of protest. I have originally defined cycles of protest as sequences of escalating collective action that are of greater frequency and intensity than normal, that spread throughout various sectors and regions of society, and that involve both new techniques of protest and new forms of organization that, in combination with traditional organizational infrastructures, "determine the spread and dynamics of the cycle" (1983: 36-39). (Although we accept the general thrust of this conceptualization, we think it would be

"real" indicators of the claims. When they are, then the claims have empirical credibility. Although this is obviously an interpretive issue, we suspect that it is easier to construct an evidential base for some claims than for others.

theoretically and empirically fruitful to modify it in several respects. First, we would extend its scope so that it could be applied to temporal variation in collective action not only at the national or sector level but also at the level of communities, regions, and the world at large. In addition, we suspect that it would be interesting to examine empirically cyclical patterns of movement industries within a larger sector or cycle, in part to assess the extent to which movement industries within the same temporal frame are affected by each other as well as similar structural factors. Finally, we think the concept of protest should be used generically, in the fashion suggested by Lofland (1985), rather than limited to noninstitutional political challenges.

#### THE CONCEPTS APPLIED: ILLUSTRATIVE PROPOSITIONS

With these conceptual and theoretical considerations in mind, we turn to an elaboration of sensitizing propositions that bear on the relation between master frames and cycles of protest. The first set of illustrative propositions pertains to the relation between master frames and the emergence of cycles of protest.<sup>5</sup> The second set concerns master frames and specific movements within a particular cycle. The third set deals with the relation between anchoring master frames and a cycle's tactical repertoire. Propositions pertaining to the relation between master frames and the shape of cycles of protest constitute a fourth set. Finally, we offer propositions associated with the relation between master frames and the decline of cycles of protest.

#### 10 Master Frames and the Emergence of Cycles of Protest

Our fundamental argument is that framing activity and the resultant ideational webs that some movements spin or that emerge from the coalescence of collective action can also be crucial to the emergence and course of a cycle of protest. Since people do not act collectively without "good reason," to assert a linkage between master frames and cycles of protest may seem almost true by definition. Yet, just as the function

5. We have designated our preliminary statements regarding the relation between master frames and cycles of protest as "illustrative" or "sensitizing" propositions so as to differentiate our assertions from more formal propositions. Although each proposition is empirically grounded in our various fieldwork experiences and observations, we do not consider them immutable components of a unified theory. Rather, we offer them as sensitizing propositions, analogous to Blumer's (1969) notion of "sensitizing concepts," to suggest and inspire questions researchers might pursue.

of ideational elements and framing activity has not been given sufficient analytic attention by much SMO research, so it has been neglected at the macrolevel of cycles of protest. In his initial discussion of the characteristics of cycles of protest, for example, Tarrow (1983) makes only passing references to the role of mobilizing ideas and meanings in relation to the rise and decline of cycles.<sup>6</sup> Here we are not asserting such a linkage, but suggesting that master frames constitute an additional defining feature of cycles of protest. Thus, our orienting proposition, *Proposition 1: Associated with the emergence of a cycle of protest is the development or construction of an innovative master frame.*

The peace movement, as a movement industry, provides concrete illustration of this linkage. Randall Forsberg's proposal for a freeze on the development, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons emerged, in 1980, as an innovative master frame that stimulated a dramatic upswing in peace movement activity throughout the first half of the decade. Previous attempts to revive the dormant peace movement had failed to generate mass mobilization. By 1963, the grim specter of nuclear holocaust had faded from the public spotlight, spawning only sporadic protests for the ensuing seventeen years (Boyer 1984), despite the fact that global strategic nuclear arsenals increased by more than eightfold during the period (Sivard 1982, 11).

Capitalizing on the bellicose rhetoric of the newly installed Reagan administration and NATO plans to deploy a new generation of nuclear weapons in Western Europe, the freeze movement amplified the severity and urgency of the nuclear threat. But it was the development of an innovative master frame that went beyond a diagnosis to include an original prognosis and a clear call to action that accounts in part for the emergence of peace movement activity in the eighties. A bilateral, verifiable freeze provided what many felt had been the missing ingredient: a simple but concrete solution to the nuclear predicament (Benford 1988, 252). Hundreds of thousands of previously passive citizens were mobilized. They took to the streets in record numbers, organized lobbying campaigns, held community referenda, revived old peace organizations, and established hundreds of new ones.

These observations not only underscore the linkage between a master frame and the clustering of collective action but also suggest that in the absence of such a frame, all other things being equal, mass mobilization is unlikely. Thus, *Proposition 2: The failure of mass mobilization when structural*

6. He has since incorporated ideational and framing considerations into his discussion of protest cycles (see Tarrow 1989).

conditions seem otherwise ripe may be accounted for in part by the absence of a resonant master frame.

We noted above that the peace movement failed to generate mass mobilization throughout the 1970s, despite the fact that conditions appeared to be conducive. More specifically, the objective conditions—such as global militarism, wars, and relatively unabated increases in nuclear weapons stockpiles, as well as structural conditions including society's resource base, political opportunity structures, and organizational infrastructures—do not appear to have been any less facilitative of peace movement activity in 1975 than they were in 1980. What was lacking in the 1970s, however, was a resonant master frame that was subsequently provided by the nuclear weapons freeze campaign.

### Master Frames and Specific Movements within a Cycle

If the foregoing set of propositions holds, it logically follows that at what point a specific smv emerges within a cycle of protest affects the substance and latitude of its framing efforts. Thus, *Proposition 3: Movements that surface early in a cycle of protest are likely to function as progenitors of master frames that provide the ideational and interpretive anchoring for subsequent movements within the cycle.* Let us return to the cycle of activity associated with the peace movement in the 1980s to illustrate this proposition.

Any number of problematic events or issues could have provided the impetus for a revival of peace movement action. International confrontations, border disputes, interventionism, militarism, chemical and biological weapons developments, apartheid, and institutional and structural violence—any could have rekindled the peace movement. Yet the reemergence of peace activity in the 1980s was associated almost solely with the nuclear threat. As already suggested, this is attributable in part to the development of the freeze concept as a master frame.

The freeze campaign framed war and peace issues in a narrow and highly compartmentalized fashion. Rather than addressing the structural roots of international conflict—superpower relations, the weaknesses of international peacekeeping institutions, and the lack of nonviolent alternatives to resolving disputes between sovereign states—the freeze defined the problem in technical terms. The ever-increasing size and destructive capacities of the United States' and the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenals constituted a threat to be controlled; the idea of a nuclear freeze offered a technological solution. Most peace movement organizations followed the freeze campaign's lead and focused attention almost exclusively on "stopping hardware" (Solo 1985, 10)—on preventing the testing, production, and development of particular weapon systems that the movement consid-

ered to be the most dangerous, the most likely to increase the probability of a nuclear war.

In light of such observations, the obverse proposition is suggested: *Proposition 4: Movements that emerge later in the cycle will typically find their framing efforts constrained by the previously elaborated master frame.* Returning to the foregoing illustration, not all peace groups went along with the freeze campaign's narrow focus. National peace coalitions and traditional pacifist organizations sought to expand the boundaries of the freeze frame to encompass other peace issues and social problems. But these frame extension efforts failed to elicit popular support and were often met by staunch resistance from freeze campaign activists. Rancorous frame disputes ensued between single-issue and multi-issue groups (Benford 1989).

The foregoing set of propositions can be further illustrated with reference to the civil rights movement. Its master frame, as initially espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr., and his associates, accented the principle of equal rights and opportunities regardless of ascribed characteristics and articulated it with the goal of integration through nonviolent means. Although there was always some tension among the movement's "big four" organizations (CORE, NAACP, SCLC, and SNCC), each initially proffered frames that were consistent with integrationist goals and nonviolent philosophy. By the mid-1960s, however, CORE and SNCC shifted their framings from the integrationist and equal rights goals of the movement's master frame to a more radical black power framing. Subsequently, both organizations suffered declines in contributions and support from both external sources and constituents, in large part because of their deviation from the movement's master frame (McAdam 1982, 181–229).

Such observations suggest that though master frames do not necessarily determine the framings of smvs that emerge later in a cycle, they do exercise considerable constraint on the content of these framings. In addition, these observations and corollary propositions point to a central reason for conflict and factionalization among smvs within a cycle of protest. Once a movement's collective action frame has become established as the master frame, efforts to extend its ideational scope may encounter resistance from its progenitors and guardians, as well as from external supporters. In turn, deviations from the master frame may be labeled as heresy and evoke social control responses from the movement's core supporters.

### Master Frames and Tactical Repertoires within a Cycle of Protest

We noted earlier that master frames not only punctuate and encode reality but also function as modes of attribution and articulation. In light of these observations, it is reasonable to suggest that the tactical

derivations and choices within a cycle of protest are affected in part by the movement's master frame. A master frame implies both new ways of interpreting a situation as well as novel means of dealing with or confronting it. Hence, *Proposition 5: Tactical innovation is spawned in part by the emergence of new master frames.*

A brief examination of the emergent tactical repertoire of the civil rights movement illustrates this proposition. As already noted, the movement's leaders fashioned a master frame that articulated the ideal of equal rights and opportunities regardless of ascribed characteristics. Jim Crow laws and segregationist practices prevalent throughout the South were targeted as blatant symbolic representations of prejudice and discrimination. Tactics such as the bus boycotts and lunch counter sit-ins were developed and deployed as a means of directly challenging Jim Crow, in part by creating within specific communities a "crisis definition of the situation" (McAdam 1983, 743). Although these tactics were not the invention of the civil rights movement, this was the first time they had been applied in those settings for that cause. The freedom rides, however, were the movement's own tactical creation. Like the boycotts and sit-ins, the freedom rides created a "crisis situation" by dramatizing for the entire nation the substance of the claims articulated by the civil rights movement's master frame (McAdam 1983, 745).

Each of these tactical innovations were congruent with the master frame espoused by King and other civil rights leaders and thus flowed directly from the movement's nonviolent philosophy. Other tactical choices, such as riots, robbery, sabotage, and violence, were eschewed by nearly all the movement's organizations and participants until the mid-1960s.

These observations further underscore the relation between master frames and tactical repertoires within a cycle of protest. Hence, *Proposition 6: Movement tactics are not solely a function of environmental constraints and adaptations, but are also constrained by anchoring master frames.* In his research on "the pace of black insurgency," McAdam (1983) concludes that the civil rights movement's internal organizational and external political opportunity structures contributed to the development of innovative protest tactics and their diffusion. Moreover, he found that as rapidly as the movement devised new tactics that were effective, its opponents developed countermeasures that neutralized the tactical inventions, prompting movement leaders to devise additional novel methods of protest. We do not take exception with these conclusions, but we do suggest that movement tactics are facilitated or constrained not only by the political environment and opponents' adaptation but also by master frames.

Master frames can exercise constraining influence on the development

of tactics in two ways. First, the development or use of tactics that are inconsistent with the diagnostic and prognostic components of a movement's master frame as well as with constituency values is unlikely. If movement action is inconsistent with the values it espouses or with its constituents' values, it renders its framing efforts vulnerable to dismissal.

As we indicated above, the development of nonviolent philosophy and strategy by the civil rights movement precluded the use of violent tactics. A similar observation can be made with respect to the peace movement and its nonviolent philosophy. A stark example of the movement's sensitivity to such constraints occurred in the summer of 1985. Just prior to the movement's annual pilgrimage to Pantex (a facility near Amarillo, Texas, where all U.S. nuclear weapons are assembled), a disarmament activist removed several feet of track from the railway artery serving the facility. His actions and subsequent arrest were widely publicized. Although organizers of the peace pilgrimage publicly condemned the protester's tactics, their coalition's reputation and credibility were damaged. The fact that his actions had jeopardized lives contradicted the movement's most frequently amplified value and indeed its master frame. Few outside the movement, including most media representatives, differentiated the actions of the lone protester from the peace coalition (Benford 1987).

The second way in which a movement's master frame can constrain tactical evolution depends on the extent to which the frame is restricted or elaborated. The more restricted the movement's master frame the narrower the range of tactical options. In contrast, movements associated with highly elaborated master frames are likely to have greater discretion regarding tactical choices.

Again, the peace movement serves to illustrate this corollary proposition. We previously suggested that the freeze constituted a highly restricted master frame. Its prognosis, a mutual, verifiable agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union, implied the use of traditional political tactics, including lobbying members of Congress to encourage them to vote for the freeze resolution and against specific weapons bills, voting in local freeze referenda, and casting votes for and contributing to pro-freeze candidates. Other tactical choices, particularly acts of civil disobedience targeting defense contractors, were initially ruled out by the movement's mainstream activists and supporters.

#### 4.9 Master Frames and the Shape of Cycles of Protest

Thus far we have discussed the relations among master frames and the emergence of cycles of protest, specific movements within those cycles, and their tactical repertoires. We now turn to the relation between

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master frames and the shape of protest cycles once they have emerged. Shape can be conceptualized in terms of two dimensional axes in which the vertical axis represents the cycle's ecological scope and the horizontal indicates its temporal span. By ecological scope, we refer to the diffusion of movement activity across different population and organizational sectors of society. Temporal span simply refers to the duration of a cycle of protest.

We have noted that one way in which master frames vary is in terms of their relative potency, and we conceptualized potency in terms of its elaborative potential and resonant capacity. We now integrate these observations with the conceptualization of shape by offering two additional propositions. The first concerns the general relation between potency and shape. Thus, Proposition 7: The shape of a cycle of protest is in part a function of the mobilizing potency of the anchoring frame.

The civil rights movement provides concrete illustration of this proposition. Because of its considerable elaborative and resonant qualities, it is a national movement that, conceptualized broadly, has spanned several decades. More specifically, its punctuation and accentuation of the idea of equal rights and opportunities amplified a fundamental American value that resonated with diverse elements of American society and thus lent itself to extensive elaboration. Movements championing women, the disabled, the aged, and American Indians, among others, were empowered in part by the civil rights master frame. Thus, though the civil rights cycle may have peaked at the height of black insurgency in the mid- to late-1960s, the cycle's ecological scope and temporal span have extended well beyond the 1960s and the plight of black Americans.

The peace movement provides further illustrative material bearing on the relation between a cycle's shape and its underlying master frame. It is our sense that the shape of the most recent cycle of peace activity in the United States is considerably different from that of the civil rights movement. The reasons are twofold. First, as we have argued elsewhere (Snow and Benford 1988), the freeze master frame lacked the same degree of empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity, thus limiting its ecological scope in comparison to the civil rights movement. And second, the highly restrictive nature of the freeze master frame limited its potential for elaboration. We suspect that the cycle's eventual decline was attributable, in part, to proponents' failure to amplify the freeze frame in more resonant and innovative ways.

In light of this observation, it follows that the shape of a cycle is not only a function of a master frame's potency; it can also be affected by the framing work of smos within a cycle. Hence, Proposition 8: The shape of a cycle of

*protest is in part a function of the capacity of incipient movements within the cycle to amplify and extend the master frame in imaginative and yet resonant ways.*

This proposition alerts us to the fact that, whatever the elaborative potential of a master frame, it does not necessarily follow that it will be amplified and extended in ways that broaden the cycle's scope. Thus, the flowering of movements such as those associated with women, Chicanos, American Indians, the aged, and the disabled on the heels of the black movement was precipitated in part by the extension of the principle of equal rights and opportunities from the domain of black America to the situation of the other groups. The obvious implication of this extension of the early civil rights master frame has been the expansion of the cycle's ecological scope and temporal span.

### 50 Master Frames and the Decline of Cycles of Protest

In our first set of propositions we suggested that a crucial factor contributing to the emergence of a cycle of protest or, conversely, the failure of mass mobilization when structural conditions appear otherwise conducive is the presence or absence of a resonant master frame. If master frames are as useful as we suggest in facilitating the emergence of protest cycles, it stands to reason that they should also contribute to understanding the decline of cycles of protest. Hence, Proposition 9: The decline or withering of an extant cycle of protest is due in part to changes in the prevailing cultural climate that render the anchoring master frame impotent. Here we are suggesting that events can sometimes begin to pass by or overwhelm a master frame and thus erode its empirical credibility or its experiential relevance.

The decline of earlier cycles of peace movement activity is illustrative. Prior to both world wars, peace movement membership, organization, support, and activity swelled to unprecedented levels (Chatfield 1971, 1973; DeBenedetti 1980; Marchand 1972; Wittner 1969). Between 1901 and 1914, forty-five new peace organizations were established in the United States (DeBenedetti 1980, 70). Its traditional pacifist ranks expanded to include "an impressive number of the nation's political, business, religious, and academic leaders" (Marchand 1972, ix). Similarly, during the decade preceding World War II, peace activism and campaigns achieved new heights. By the mid-1930s, antiwar strikes and other demonstrations on campuses became commonplace (Wittner 1969).

In each instance, the outbreak of war reduced the movement to its pacifist core. World War I undercut peace adherents' "faith in human reason, progress, Christianity, Great Power harmony, and the need for a working peacekeeping mechanism" (DeBenedetti 1980, 79). Likewise, the rise

of fascism, the onset of the Holocaust, and Pearl Harbor provided most peace adherents and sympathizers with a seemingly insurmountable challenge to the credibility of the movement's master frame. Consequently, by 1941 Americans "renounced pacifism with the same fervor with which they had previously renounced war" (Witner 1969, 16).

Although the foregoing discussion illustrates that cycles can decline owing to changes in the cultural or political environment, their demise can also be explained in part by the emergence of frames that challenge or compete with the movement's master frame. The debates that ensue and the very existence of competing frames can chip away at the mobilizing potency of the original master frame. In light of such contingencies, we offer a final proposition: *Proposition 10: The emergence of competing frames can suggest the vulnerabilities and irrelevance of the anchoring master frame, thus challenging its resonance and rendering it increasingly impotent.*

The cycle of peace movement activity that emerged in the aftermath of World War II provides an illustration of this proposition. The gruesome effects of the war and the development of the atomic bomb led many pacifists and peace adherents to the conclusion that world government offered the only hope for the survival of our species. Although the notion of world government had been a persistent theme of earlier cycles of peace movement activity, it had constituted only one of many planks in the peace movement's platform. Following the war, however, world government emerged as a potent master frame, one that engendered widespread popular support (DeBenedetti 1980; Witner 1969).

Its potency was short-lived, however. World government soon elicited competing frames from within the peace movement. "What the world needed," countered some traditional pacifists, "was not more authority at the top, but rather greater cooperation of peoples at the bottom in solving their mutual problems" (Witner 1969, 179). This and other competing frames underscored for many the weaknesses of world government as a panacea for problems pertaining to war and peace. Many peace activists subsequently defected from the world government movement.

If the internal attacks on world government diminished its potency as a master frame, external attacks dealt it a deathblow. By the early 1950s counterframing efforts led by Senator Joseph McCarthy successfully equated world government with communism (DeBenedetti 1980; Witner 1969). In the face of such resonant frames, individuals and peace organizations could no longer afford to be associated with world government advocacy. The movement subsequently dissociated itself from the master frame, and thereafter world government remained, at best, marginal to the peace movement. Lacking a potent master frame, the peace movement suffered a period of decline.

The fifth set of propositions could just as easily have been illustrated with reference to any number of other movements. But the foregoing discussion suffices to show that extant master frames can either lose their interpretive salience owing to the profusion of events and the proliferation of alternative framings or be neutralized by the repressive tactics of more powerful groups, or both. Hence, the mobilizing potency of the master frame begins to dissipate, and the cycle with which it has been associated begins to decline.

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we have explored the relation between master frames and cycles of protest by enumerating ten interconnected propositions. Basing our argument on our contention that smos function as, among other things, signifying or framing agents actively engaged in the production of meaning and ideas, we have suggested that the products of this framing activity, which we refer to as collective action frames, can sometimes come to function as master algorithms that color and constrain the orientations and activities of other movements associated with it, ecologically and temporally. Simply put, we have argued that master frames affect the cyclicity and clustering of social movement activity.

Although we realize that some scholars may take issue with the illustrative case materials employed, we reiterate that our objective here has been primarily theoretical, and, as such, we view this exercise as a springboard for systematic empirical investigation. Assessment of the analytic utility of this essay is contingent on future investigations.

Empirical reservations notwithstanding, we think several important implications flow from our conceptual framework. First, our scheme provides the conceptual tools for systematically examining the relation between existing ideologies and challenges to them and their dialectical relationship in a fashion consistent with Gramsci (1971) and Rude (1980), who, among others, regard ideational factors as important variables in the collective action equation.

A second implication pertains to ongoing sociological concern with the relation between micro- and macrostructural phenomena. Specifically, we have detailed theoretically how framing activity at the level of social movement organizations and actors can have significant implications for macrostructural phenomena such as cycles of protest.

Finally, our theoretical formulation complements and supplements resource mobilization and other structuralist perspectives in at least three ways. For one thing, the framing process and the concepts of collective

action frames and master frames provide a basis for understanding the process through which collective action is inspired and legitimated. Second, these conceptual tools enable us to examine empirically rather than take for granted the process through which events and actions come to be regarded as desirable or undesirable, more or less costly, and more or less risky. And last, the analysis suggests that framing issues and processes can play an important role in affecting political opportunities, changes in the larger political environment, and the availability of resources.

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