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‘Nationalist’ Master Frame: The Case
with the Bulgarian Anti and Pro Nuclear
Social Movements-Economic and
Political Implications**

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**Central European University
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To All, who have the courage to pursue their ideals, no matter what ‘authorities’ say

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From Sustainability Frame To Nationalist Master Frame: The Case of the Bulgarian Anti and Pro Nuclear Social Movements

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Vox Populi Vox Dei

Introduction

Translation is power. As agents of power experienced translators can create powerful action frames that challenge the established routines. Individual beliefs that are sanctioned through ‘mutual awareness’ evolve into ‘collective beliefs’. The latter then are further shaped by properly translated frames to emerge as a social force. In this research paper, I explore *how the collective action frames are restructured, specifically the role of the printed and electronic media in shaping the public discourse*. The research is supported by the Bulgarian nuclear case, where an antinuclear collective action frame for less than ten years, was restructured into ‘national pride’ pro-nuclear frame through the translation of the media

Structure of the Paper

In the first section of the paper, I explore in detail how global collective action frames develop and the three aspects involved in this process—illegitimate inequality, identity and agency. Then I am interested what are the common beliefs that shape the collective identity of antinuclear movements and what is their collective action frame.

Then briefly the Bulgarian case is introduced, where by late 1980’s the frame over nuclear issues was overlapping with the global ‘sustainable frame’ that prevailed in most Western societies by that time.

In the second section I explore what is what is the collective frame over the nuclear issues in the late 90's and how the newly-emerged 'national pride' frame is a classical example for restructuring of a collective action frame.

In the third section I explore the agents of the reframing process and more closely the role of the media in shaping the collective beliefs. In the final part I elaborate on the question how the process of mass media's translation in the Bulgarian case was crucial for the complete shift of the frame from 'sustainability' to 'national pride'. I conclude with the question of authorities, losing their legitimacy, because of their lack of creating counterframes.

1.The Sustainability Movement as a source of universal master frames

There is something more than symbolism involved in the fact that on the day Martin Luther King was shot, the environmental movement was growing in prominence. The civil rights movement and the environmental movement had emerged in the public sphere in the sixties with abundance of linkages between them. They are even more interconnected today. Michael Neuman defined them with the term ' Sustainability Movement', because it captures both the human and non-human aspects of the environmental and civil rights movements¹. The master frame of the 'Sustainability Movement' is shaped by the collective beliefs of its supporters that they draw their legitimacy from 'the laws of Nature' and the 'intrinsic human rights by birth'. That is why it was very easy for this movement to frame their opponents as 'who is against us is against Humanity'. The civil rights and ecological issue movements also have great mobilizing power and are capable of constructing strong collective action frames.

¹ Neuman , Michael Civil Rights/Environmental Movements, and the Sustainability Movement .
<http://www.newdream.org/conversation-arc/msg01670.html>, last ac. 2002-12-14

According to Snow and Benford, a *master frame* is a frame that functions as a paradigm to several movements.² The master frame of environmental and social sustainable development triggers such movements as the green movement, the peace movement, the antinuclear movement. The latter is of greatest significance for this research paper.

1.Development of global collective action frames

A most important question is how such global collective action frames develop? According to Gamson 'collective action frame' is 'a set of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns'³. Bert Klandermans⁴ implies that in the process of collective action frame formation, three aspects are involved -*injustice, identity* and *agency*. Injustice is usually defined as outrage about the way authorities are treating a social problem.⁵

1.1.Injustice

Social psychology usually refers to illegitimate inequality as the main reason for this outrage. However, the feeling of injustice can arise from other kinds of grievances. As Klandermans defines them, on one hand, this could be suddenly imposed grievances and, on the other, common beliefs that certain moral principles have been violated. In the global antinuclear movement actors are outraged by the way governments are treating the use of nuclear weapons and technologies in their domestic military programs and the use of nuclear plants in the energy sector. So there is a combination of illegitimate inequality and violated moral principles.

1.1.1.Illegitimate inequality

²Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1992. 'Master frames and cycles of protest'. Edited by Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller. New Heaven:Yale University Press

³ Gamson ,William A. 1992. Talking Politics Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press

⁴ Klandermans, Bert. 1997. 'The Social Psychology of Protest'. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers

⁵ Ibid., p.37- 63

Brenda Major⁶ divides the generation of feelings of illegitimate inequality into two processes- comparison and legitimation. The comparison between the global antinuclear actors and the respective pro-nuclear power-holders shows inequality in the way each of them treats the nuclear issues and thus for antinuclear activists, the authorities lose their legitimacy. The former's 'social contract' with the state is cancelled and they demand change of representation. As Klandermans states the casual attributions to governments as external agents are crucial for such a development.⁷

1.1.2. Violated Moral Norms

The proliferation of social movements in the sixties is connected with extensive cultural transformations and emergence of 'new values'. The new values then foster the emergence of new social movements.⁸ New values in society in the sixties required new social contract with the power-holders, which governed in compliance with old norms, considered illegitimate from new social actors' perspective. In the antinuclear movement moral indignation on authorities failing to comply with the antinuclear sentiment of a large part of the public is another major cause for the latter to question the legitimacy of the governments.

1.2. Identity

Most sociologists and social psychologists agree on the fact that collective identity cannot be 'mechanically generated'. However, it has been found that 'even the minimal intervention of assigning people randomly to different groups is enough to invoke ingroup-outgroup dynamics.'⁹ What are the common beliefs that shape the collective identity of

⁶ Major, Brenda. 1994. 'From Social Inequality to Personal Entitlement: The Role of Social Comparisons, Legitimacy Appraisals, and Group Membership'. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*

⁷ Klandermans, Bert. 1997. p.39-40

⁸ Kriesi, Hanspeter. 1993. 'Political Mobilization and Social Change. The Dutch Case in Comparative Perspective. Aldershot: Avebury

⁹ Hewstone, Miles, Wolfgang Stroebe and Geoffrey Stevenson. 1996. 'Introduction to Social Psychology, 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell

antinuclear movements? The answer can be provided by the antinuclear agenda of Friends of Earth –Europe¹⁰, taken from their web site:

- *no upgrading projects for nuclear power plants*
 - *full transparency of nuclear policy*
 - *closing down of the most dangerous reactors (Chernobyl, Bohunice, Kozloduy, Ignalina)*
 - *closing down of nuclear reactors under construction (Chmelnytsky, Rovno, Mochovce, Temelín)*
 - *no funding for high-risk reactors*
 - *no lifetime extension of nuclear power plants*
 - *no electricity exports to the EU from high risk reactors*
 - *no market distortion by former and current subsidies for nuclear energy (e.g. EURATOM)*
- Using Gamson's¹¹ terminology, antinuclear activists unite around similar agendas that

‘produce a ‘we’ feeling and casual attributions that denote a ‘they’, which is held responsible for the collective grievances’. We-‘friends of humanity’ and they- ‘whose financial interests require them to hide the truth from the public’, to quote Jane Fonda in a Newsweek article. This casual attributions that governments ‘hide’ the whole truth from the public is one of the major sources of oppositional consciousness and moral indignation. It is the core of the antinuclear activists-authorities dispute.

1.3. Agency

The last Klandermans’ element crucial for collective action frame formation is agency. Common beliefs that collective action can be successful are the key to the social construction of protest.¹² Michael Schwartz and Shuva Paul¹³ explore the fact that movements should sooner or later produce ‘a success story’ in order to survive. Movements should organize events in such a way that the positive success expectations are always viable and they are perceived as agents of social change.

In defining the answer to the question how global master frames develop, it is assumed that common beliefs should be formed, shaped by Injustice, Identity and Agency factors. In the

¹⁰ Friends of Earth Position Paper on Nuclear Power Plants and Enlargement. 2001.

<http://www.foeeurope.org/activities/nuclear/enlargement.htm>, last updated 2001-10-31, last accessed 2002-12-15

¹¹ Gamson, William A. 1992.

¹² Klandermans, Bert. 1997.

case of the antinuclear movement, which is relevant for this research, the common grievances, shaped by antinuclear activists' common beliefs are connected with authorities, promoting the use and implementation of nuclear weapons and nuclear plants and technology.

2.Universal Master Frame in the Bulgarian Case

I will introduce briefly the Bulgarian case, where in the early 1990's, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ecological movement was part of the broad consensus over the 'big transformation' of society. Moreover the Bulgarian dissidents used the ecological issue as the *major mobilizing power* against the communist regime in 1989. I will illustrate the situation with the particular Bulgarian example that made the Bulgarian public opinion in the late 80's easy to mobilize around the ecological issues. A Romanian chemical factory, just across the biggest Bulgarian city on the Danube, Rousse, has been poisoning this city with chlorine for decades. The communist authorities did not solve this problem in the name of *Ceaushesku-Zhivkovist* communist solidarity. The whole Bulgarian society shared the 'oppositional consciousness' and 'moral indignation' about the way the regime was treating this social problem, which concerned 300 000 people in the fourth largest Bulgarian city. Thus, it was easy for eco-activists to frame the regime as the 'obstacle to clean air for our children'. This was a very powerful uniting frame, much more influential than the 'poor economic performance' frame, for example. The people had already developed a shared collective identity of '*we -the people who want to breathe*' and '*they -who want to kill us*'. So, by the 1980's, there were two of the three factors present in society - *injustice* and *identity* in order for a powerful action frame to develop. The third, most important, *agency*, was available by early 1988. Following Gorbachov's *Perestroika/1997/*, first oppositional 'non-formal' movements emerged. Regarding this analysis it is not a surprise that two of the most active

¹³ Schwartz, Michael and Shuva Paul. 1992. 'Resource Mobilization versus the Mobilization of People:Why

and popular were the ‘Committee for the Environmental Protection of the City of Rousse’ and ‘Ecoglasnost.’(environmentalists). They were perceived as the agents, who can lead the process of societal change-. Thus, in Bulgaria the protest against the regime was framed mainly around ecological issues. In such a situation it is not a surprise that the societal attitude towards nuclear power in the early 1990’s was overlapping with the global frame of the antinuclear movements, discussed in detail in the previous section.

People considered the country’s nuclear plant ‘Kozloduy’ as dangerous, obsolete and therefore it should be shut. The nuclear plant was part of the ecologists’ ‘anti-communist frame’; it was something that belonged to the ‘old time’, thus automatically considered bad. This opinion was part of the society’s common beliefs and also disseminated by all major Bulgarian newspapers and the media in the early democratic years.

2.National Dignity Master Frame

What is the collective action frame in the same society over the nuclear issue that can identify and mobilize people ten years later? By the end of the 90’s the same society that protested for the closure of the nuclear plant had developed a completely reverse collective action frame. If we have to divide it using the Klandermans’ typology, which is used in this analysis, the injustice, identity and agency in this new context must be explored.

1. Injustice and Identity

What is interesting in this particular case is that the feeling of illegitimate inequality is again present, but this time the intergroup comparison is not among ‘we’-citizens against ‘they’-government, but the we-‘Bulgarians’, against them ‘the Western European conspiracy’.

In this case, Major's¹⁴ intergroup comparison, which fosters the feeling of inequality, is not among groups in the same society, but it is raised to the national level. The outcome of this comparison is that 'they treat us differently than their societies and than the similar societies of the neighboring countries. /Ironically, as in the case with the chemical plant, the signifier is again to be found in neighboring Romania. 'Their' newly built power plant Cherna Voda/1996/, sponsored by the European Union, while the latter demand the closure of 'our' plant, triggers the feeling of 'unequal treatment'. There is a common belief in the society that behind the pressures for the decommissioning of the old reactors stand some Western commercial interests.¹⁵

The second aspect of illegitimate inequality is questioning the legitimacy of 'their' European institutions that demand the closure of 'our' plant. By the end of the 1990's the whole society shared the common belief that Bulgarian government, which is considered the legitimate representative, should not comply with the European Union's demand to close four of the nuclear plant reactors by 2006. Moreover, it is striking that large proportion of the population, believe that the nuclear plant is of bigger priority than the country's membership in the EU, and if they must choose, they prefer 'out of Europe, *but* with Kozloduy'. That fact seriously undermines the whole philosophy on which the transformation of the society is based. The whole legitimacy of the European Institutions is questioned and the society's paramount priority is shifted from integration to isolation. This process is connected with the reconstruction of social identity and reconstruction of collective action frames. Here I speak of the formation of the 'nationalistic master frame', which was fully- developed by the early years of 2000's.

2.Agency

¹⁴ Major, Brenda. 1994. 'From Social Inequality to Personal Entitlement...'

¹⁵ American University-Washington. 'TED Case Studies-Bulgarian Nuclear Power Plant Kozloduy' <http://www.american.edu/TED/BULGARNK.HTM>, last updated 2001-10-31, last accessed 2002-12-16

The Processes of Globalization and interconnectedness produces such peculiar cases, which are heterodox to early classical social movements' theory. In the Bulgarian case, the agent which the society expects to lead the protest is the government itself, against the 'foreign governments'. A nation-wide petition demanding the government to protect the nuclear plant collected 600 000 signatures. It was later introduced into the parliament. Is the government willing to be the agent of such a movement? On the one hand a positive answer to this question would mean isolation from the European integration process with all the consequences from that decision. On the other hand if it refuses to lead the societal protest, it risks losing its own legitimacy. This theory is supported by the recent development of this case, when the government agreed to close the first four reactors (November, 2002) and unions, citizens, major political opposition parties, and thousands of people protested on the streets against that decision. People demand the resignation of the government and a national referendum for the preservation of the plant. Again a process of restructuring of the collective identity appeared, as the national government is incorporated in the broader casual attribution of 'they' to the foreign authorities.

What is most important for this research is not whether the authorities want to take the pro or con side in the dispute, but how the reconstruction of collective action frames takes place. How are common beliefs constructed and reconstructed? How did the Bulgarian society reconstruct the global 'sustainability' antinuclear frame into the 'national pride' pro-nuclear frame for less than a decade? The answer to these questions requires some theoretical elaboration on the term 'public opinion'.

3.The Public Opinion

Although for decades social scientists could not produce one common definition of public opinion, Irving Crespi¹⁶ provides a very good model for describing it. According to him public opinion emerges as a part of three dimensional process in which *transactions*, *communications* and *political legitimation* are involved. The transactions is the process of interaction ‘among attitudinal systems, controversial situational contexts, and perceived reality worlds.’¹⁷ This interaction makes possible the emergence of **individual opinions**. Second through communication individual opinions are sanctioned to evolve into **collective opinions**. Crespi writes about this ‘sanctioning’:

Without a process in which individuals grasp how their opinions compare with the assumptions, feelings and beliefs of others-both concordant and discordant, individual opinions can be no more than a hodgepodge of idiosyncrasies.

The most important consequence of communication is that by developing ‘mutual awareness of one another’s opinions’, collective opinions emerge as a social force. The process of legitimation positions the collective opinion within the political framework-what are the ‘linkages of collective opinion to government’¹⁸. The next question that should be clarified in order to understand how collective frames are restructured is what is the role of the media in the shaping of the public discourse. Klandermans¹⁹ defines it as ‘an interplay of media discourse and interpersonal interactions.’ He implies also that the role of the media as an opinion former is much stronger in issues, which are not experienced directly in the daily transactions between individuals and their environments. For example, the media is much more influential over nuclear issues as they are not directly linked to the daily environment, with which individuals interact. Thus for nuclear issues, the way media translates them is strongly related to the collective opinion’ formation.

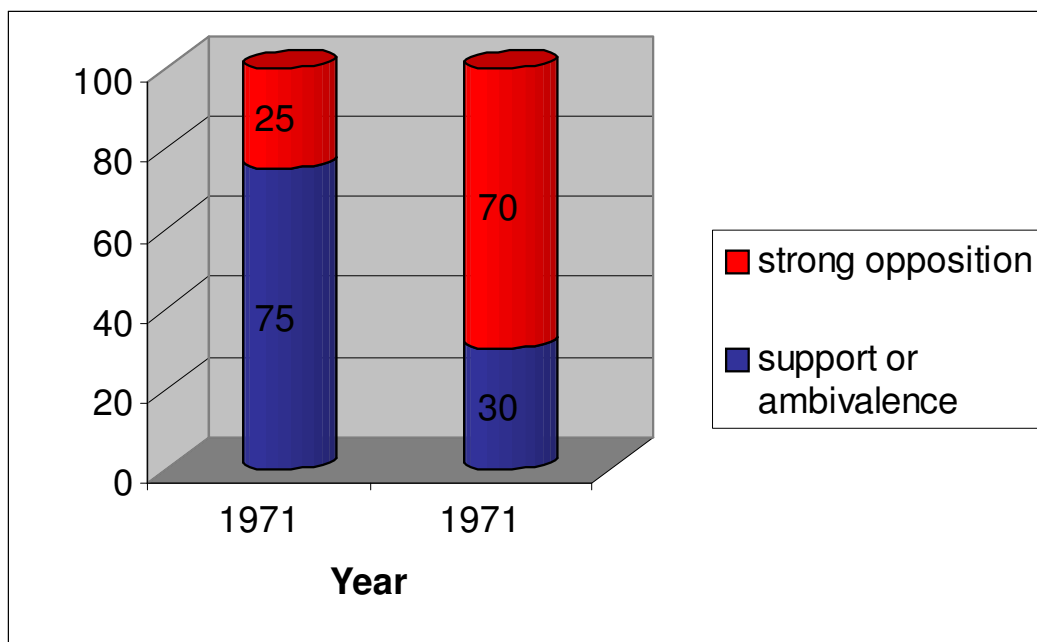
3.The Mass Media’s Role in the Reframing Process

¹⁶ Crespi, Irving . 1997. ‘The Public Opinion Process’. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

¹⁷ Ibid., ‘A Public Opinion Model’

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Klandermans, Bert. 1997.



Klandermans²⁰ points out that the media discourse is of crucial significance for the reframing process. Media discourse may influence the public opinion, but in a

Source: Mazur, Allan. 1988. 'Mass Media Effects on Public Opinion about Nuclear Power Plants'. Unpubl. Syracuse University

The change of US's public opinion on the Nuclear Issue in the 70's and 80's

Fig.1

society where the climate of opinion is already sympathetic to change.²¹Allan Mazur found that 'it is the public's generally heightened awareness of environmental issues'²²that brings the nuclear issue to the media. Then media attention creates a favorable climate to the antinuclear movement. This in turn mobilizes protesters, which in turn produces more media coverage. This is how the American public opinion, already sympathetic to ecological issues, following the Three Mile Island (1979) and Chernobyl(1986) accidents, reversed dramatically from 70% support to 70% strong opposition of nuclear power/Fig.1/

Similarly, in the Bulgarian case at the end of 1990's, when the transition started the existing frame in the society was consistent with the global 'sustainability' frame that was dominant in nearly all Western societies and that was-'*nuclear is bad*'. Later the 'transactions

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

with the environment' began to shift the individual opinions of the people. Through communication, individual opinions evolved to collective opinions on the issue. The new emerging frames were '*Our nuclear plant has been repaired-and is healthy now*' and the more mobilizing one '*They (EU) are pushing us to close it, because they have economic interests.*'

Regarding these developments, by 1995 the climate of public opinion on the nuclear issue was already sympathetic to change. This is exactly when in 1996, the major Bulgarian Newspapers like '24 hours' and 'Trud', together with the National Television –Channel One, spread the news that the European Union is financing a new nuclear plant in neighboring Romania.

The Media signified the emergence of a new frame 'They' are treating us unequally'. It also named the grievances and completely shaped the 'we' and 'they' identities. Finally, the media acted as the agent, through which these common grievances were named. Since that moment this 'conspiracy frame' became the master frame on the issue and appeared constantly in all electronic and printed media in different variations. We can see how persistent it was in a publication three years after the initial news was spread:

'France and Canadian companies that have put money into Romania's sole nuclear plant at Cernavoda would like Romania to replace Bulgaria as a Balkan energy supplier' (Newspaper Daily-24 Hours, April, 1999²³).

The frame has evolved into strong 'Power Wars' frame and managed to mobilize around the 'national identity' and 'national pride' frames. The governments which are perceived as the

²² Mazur, Allan. 1988.'Mass Media Effects on Public Opinion about Nuclear Power Plants' . Unpubl. Syracuse University

²³ Chiriac, Marian . 1999. 'Power Wars' Between Romania And Bulgaria' . <http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat/emu/Chiriac1199.html>

agent of the social protest, are less and less willing to support 'the national frame', faced with the opportunity of exclusion from the European Union integration processes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that the lack of debate in society about its priorities for development is the reason for the troubled situation authorities face now. This case is a vivid example how power-holders' poor ability to counterframe an existing frame unfavorable for them, could cost loss of legitimacy. For example the government could have counterframed with 'EU will bring more money than the loses from the closure of the plant' frame.

The construction of a collective action frame is shaped both by the individuals' transactions with environment and by the media discourse. The latter could influence the public opinion, but only in a society where the climate of opinion is already sympathetic to change. In such a society, the media attention creates a favorable climate to the social movement. This in turn mobilizes protesters, which in turn produces more media coverage. The media sanctions the feeling of illegitimate inequality, contributes to the shaping of identity and provides agency for the restructuring of a collective action frame.

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