

## Making Meanings

### DEMOLISHING A MOSQUE<sup>1</sup>

At 11 AM on December 6, 1992, in the holy city of Ayodhya, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, a group of young men carrying hammers and iron rods erupted into the Babri mosque. This mosque, which was built during the Moghul (i.e., Muslim) domination of India, stood on land that had supposedly held a temple to the Hindu god Ram. The young men, or *kar sevaks*, were volunteers loosely affiliated with three Hindu nationalist groups: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and the rapidly rising Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had gained almost a third of the votes in the 1991 elections and governed the state (Jaffrelot 1996: 558). Although Hindu nationalism was on the rise all over India, it was particularly volatile here in the North (Brass 1974, Jaffrelot 1996, Mehta 1993).

By lunchtime, as the police stood by, the mosque's idols, collection boxes, and portraits were carried off by the crowd. By 2:55 PM, the left dome of the building had caved in; by 4:35, the right one fell too, and the central one followed a few minutes later. "Even before that," continues Christophe Jaffrelot, "Muslims were attacked in Ayodhya town and many houses whose inhabitants had fled were set ablaze." After the demolition was complete, the *kar sevaks* constructed a temporary temple in which Hindu images were placed (p. 455).

That day's carnage was not an isolated event. Even under the British Raj, to avoid communal violence, the British had divided the space inside the mosque between Muslims and Hindus. But from partition of the subcontinent in 1947

<sup>1</sup> My all-too-brief account of this long and tangled story is based on the accounts of Ved Mehta, "The Mosque and the Temple: The Rise of Fundamentalism" (1993); Pradeep Chhibber and Subhash Misra, "Hindus and the Babri Masjid: The Sectional Bias of Communal Attitudes" (1993); Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (1996); and Ashis Nandy et al. *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (1998); and on the kind advice of my colleagues, Ron Herring and Mary Katzenstein.

onward, because Hindus believed the mosque was built on the site of a Hindu temple, conflict swirled around possession of the site:

- In 1949, icons of Lord Ram appeared in the mosque, and both Hindu and Muslim parties launched civil suits for its possession. The then-secularist government, declaring the site "disputed," locked the gates.
- In 1984, a movement was started by the VHP and the BJP under the leadership of L.K. Advani to build a Hindu temple to honor Ram.
- In 1986, a district judge ordered the opening of the disputed structure to Hindus, but the central government resisted.
- In 1989–1990, the VHP intensified its activities by laying foundations of the Ram temple on property adjacent to the mosque.
- In 1990, the first attempt to attack the temple was made.

Although these events gravitated around the symbolic importance of Ayodhya, they were part of a broader movement challenging the secular foundations of the Indian state and seeking to identify it with the majority Hindu religion. In the 1980s, a TV series popularizing the story of the Ramayana played a leading role in creating a new national Hindu identity (Rudolph 1992). At the same time, the BJP began to employ in its election campaign a new repertoire of aggressive, religiously tinted rituals. Excited marchers in religious/political processions frequently would enter Muslim neighborhoods, stones would be thrown at them, and, in reply, young Hindu hotheads would loot businesses and burn houses (Jaffrelot, p. 392). These processions-turned-riots raged across the subcontinent to the point that one expert called them an "institutionalized riot system" (Brass 2003). Religious imagery and political theatrics also came together in the *Rath Yatra* – a religion-tinged chariot procession – by which BJP leader Advani criss-crossed the country during the 1990 elections. Advani traveled more than 10,000 km in a symbol-bedecked vehicle meant to evoke the chariot used by Hindu hero Arjuna on his way to battle. As he came closer to Ayodhya, he was arrested in the state of Bihar, initiating another cycle of violence (Jaffrelot: 418–419).

The worst violence followed the Ayodhya demolition, especially in the city of Bombay (now Mumbai), where a local nativist organization, the Shiv Sena, took advantage of the excitement over the mosque's destruction to stir up anti-Muslim violence (Katzenstein, Mehta and Thakkar 1997; Jaffrelot p. 459). As in Ayodhya, the police took the side of the militants. By January 1993, more than 500 people were dead, the majority of them Muslims, thousands had fled, and others were forced to move into protected Muslim neighborhoods.

The controversy did not end there. The courts and the central government went back and forth for years over the responsibility for the demolition of the mosque, over whether there had ever been a Hindu temple on the site, and over the future of the site. A high-level commission by retired Supreme Court Justice S.M. Liberhan was appointed to look into all these questions and propose a solution. It was only in 2009 that the Liberhan report was submitted to the

government.<sup>2</sup> It condemned just about everybody but proposed no solution to the dispute over ownership of the mosque.

#### WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE?

What can we learn from this series of explosive incidents between Muslims and Hindus, secularists and religious militants, in South Asia? We could, of course, inscribe the story in the empirically rich and theoretically provocative literature on communalism (Brass 1974). We could also see it in the light of theories of nationalism, which has a long and intimate relationship with religion (Aminzade and Perry 2001). We could see it as the fuel of political party conflict (Chandra 2004) and public opinion, which was divided over the demolition of the mosque (Chhibber and Misra 1993). Or we could see it in the light of theories of civil society and social capital (Varshney 2002). Instead, I will use this sequence of events to help explicate the complex, subtle, and confusing issue of how meaning is made in contentious politics. For what the coalition of Hindu nationalist forces was trying to do through the contentious events they stage-managed was to construct a new and militant national identity built on the Hindu religion.

All movement leaders proffer symbolically laden messages to gain support from followers, attract fence sitters, and mark themselves off from opponents. This is one reason why public actions of movements take the form of “performances”: Their performances compete for public space with entertainment, news, other movements, and government attempts to monopolize the formation of opinion. A performance is at once a spectacle and an action that is part of a repertoire of contention (see Chapter 5). At times, actors emphasize the spectacle aspect, both to attract the attention of the media and to set themselves off from conventional political actors. But performances are also goal-oriented, as when the *Rath Yatra* was used to attract supporters in an election campaign.

Over the past two decades, students of social movements and contentious politics have recognized that movements do not simply seek instrumental goods; they also make and manipulate meanings. But analysts differ about just how movements make meaning. At least three main mechanisms can be extracted from the recent “cultural turn” in the study of social movements:

*First*, movements *frame contentious politics*. Starting with the work of David Snow and his collaborators, students define framing as the construction of an interpretive scheme that simplifies and condenses the “world out there,” just as journalists “frame” a story by selectively punctuating and encoding objects (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). We saw such a process of framing when the Ayodhya militants framed their attacks on Muslims as the need to defend Hindu tradition. As a pamphlet put out by the RSS in 1988 put it, “My temples have been desecrated, destroyed. Their sacred stones are being

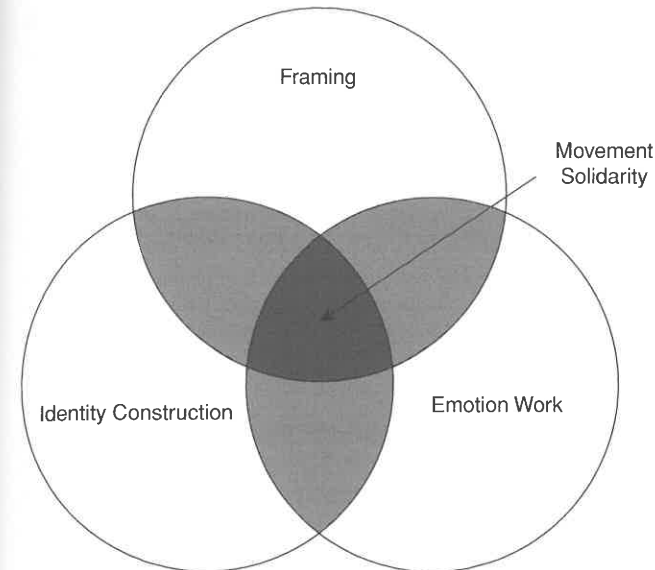


FIGURE 7.1. Components of Movement Solidarity

trampled under the aggressor’s feet. My gods are crying. They are demanding of me for reinstatement in all their original glory” (quoted by Jaffrelot, p. 391).

*Second*, movements *define, crystallize, and construct collective identities*. Starting with the pioneering work of Alberto Melucci (1988), scholars have increasingly seen identities not as an “essentialist” component of collective action, but as a constructed set of boundary mechanisms that define who “we” are, who “they” are, and the locations of the borders between them. Attacking the Ayodhya mosque was a product of the attempt to reconstruct a nationalist identity around a religious one and define Muslims as outside that identity (Nandy et al. 1998).

*Third*, scholars have increasingly focused on how movements *reflect, capture, and shape emotions* to mobilize followers. In the Ayodhya episode, the RSS constructed the image of Ram as an *angry* god (Jaffrelot, pp. 391–392) who feels humiliation at the alleged aggression of Muslims and is anxious to assert his lost prerogatives. His anger was used to justify the rage of his followers and, thus, to justify their violent acts.

Scholars of social movements who have taken the cultural turn have wrestled over which of the three – framing, identity construction, or emotion – are the most important parts of the culture of contention. What seems clear is that all three are important elements in creating solidarity among potential movement participants and activating them. We will best understand this combination if we can show how framing, identity, and emotions are combined in episodes of contentious politics. Figure 7.1 lays out the agenda for this chapter and indicates what will have to be shown: that framing, identities, and emotions

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8125927.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8125927.stm). Accessed March 9, 2010.

intersect to produce the solidarities with which social movements interact with allies, opponents, and authorities.

### Framing Contention

In an important series of papers, David Snow and his collaborators adapted Erving Goffman's (1974) concept of framing to the study of collective action, arguing that a special category of cognitive understandings – collective action frames – relates to how social movements construct meaning for action.<sup>3</sup> A frame, to repeat Snow and Benford's definition, is 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 (1992: 137).

Framing, according to Bert Klandermans, "is a process in which social actors, media and members of a society jointly interpret, define and re-define states of affairs" (1997: 44). Collective action frames may "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" (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). Social movements are deeply involved in the work of "naming" grievances, connecting them to other grievances, and constructing larger frames of meaning that will resonate with a population's cultural predispositions and communicate a uniform message to power holders and to others (p. 136).

Goffman's term "framing" originally applied to how an *individual* constructs reality, but in the social movement tradition that grew out of his work, scholars have focused on how *movements* frame specific grievances with collective action frames that dignify claims, connect them to others, and help to produce a collective identity. But the concept can be enlarged to relate to how entire episodes of contention, their actors, and their actions are interactively framed by participants, their opponents, the press, and significant third parties (McAdam et al. 2001: 45). Framing is carried out not only by social movement organizers, but also by the media, by other sources of information, and by the state. Indeed, framing goes well beyond how a movement's goals are strategically formed to a much broader set of interpretive processes, which build on inherited understandings and engage in "framing contests" between challengers and their opponents (p. 48).

Movement entrepreneurs do not simply adapt frames of meaning from traditional cultural symbols; if they did, they would be proffering to their

<sup>3</sup> For their most important theoretical contributions, see Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes" (1986); Snow and Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization" (1988), and "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest" (1992); Robert Benford, "Frame Disputes within the Disarmament Movement" (1993); and Robert Benford and Scott Hunt, "Dramaturgy and Social Movements" (1992). Also see the synthesis of this work in Snow's "Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields" (2004).

followers nothing more than reflections of their societies' values – a move that would inhibit them from challenging these values. They orient their movements' frames toward action, and fashion them at the intersection between a target population's inherited culture and its own values and goals.<sup>4</sup> But sometimes they try to transform inherited frames. This was the goal of the Hindu nationalists who attempted to transform the inherited secular frame of Indian nationalism into one based on the symbols of its majority religion (Nandy 1995).

The process of frame alignment is not always easy, clear, or uncontested. First, movement leaders have to compete with authorities, the media, and the market for cultural legitimacy. These are competitors with immensely powerful cultural resources at their disposal. Second, movements that adapt too well to their societies' cultures can alienate their most militant supporters – for what society has dominant values that do not support existing power arrangements? Third, ordinary people often have their own "reading" of events that may differ from those constructed by their leaders. A considerable effort at consensus mobilization is often necessary to break constituents of their inherited habits of thought. In doing so, two kinds of strategies are often employed: injustice framing and bricolage.

### Injustice Framing

A recurring mode of discourse in contentious politics is built around what William Gamson calls an "injustice frame" (1992a: 68, 73). In the same vein, writes Barrington Moore Jr., any movement against oppression "has to develop a new diagnosis and remedy for existing forms of suffering, a diagnosis and remedy by which this suffering stands morally condemned" (1978: 88). Similarly, Doug McAdam argues that "before collective action can get underway, people must collectively define their situations as unjust" (1999 [1982]: 51). "Injustice," concludes Gamson, "focuses on the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul" (1992b: 32).

But it is no simple matter to convince normally passive people that the indignities and inequalities of everyday life can be challenged. Contention may point to a grievance, identify a constituency, and name an enemy. But, writes Gamson, "it is insufficient if individuals privately adopt a different interpretation of what is happening. For collective adoption of an injustice frame, it must be shared by the potential challengers in a public way" (1992a: 73). Inscripting grievances in frames that identify an injustice, attribute the responsibility for it to others, and proposing solutions to it is a central activity of social

<sup>4</sup> This is what Snow and his associates call "frame alignment" (1986). In their article, they describe four alignment processes through which movements formulate their messages in relation to the existing culture of politics. The first three – "frame bridging," "frame amplification," and "frame extension" – make only incremental innovations in symbolism. But a more ambitious strategy is the fourth one – "frame transformation." It is the most important framing device in movements that seek substantial social change (pp. 467–474).

movements. This is what the Hindu nationalists did in reconstructing the myth of the destroyed temple in Ayodhya; this allowed them to convince majority Hindus that the very existence of a mosque on this holy ground demanded collective action (Jaffrelot, pp. 401–402).

### Bricolage

The French term *bricolage* (“do-it-yourself”) was imported to political science by Richard Samuels (2003) to describe the mixture of traditional and modern themes employed by Italian and Japanese leaders in building their states. Social movement leaders often do the same: Familiar themes are arrayed to entice citizens to become supporters; and new themes are soldered onto them to activate them in new and creative directions. Bricolage pulls together accepted and new frames to legitimate contention and mobilize accepted frames for new purposes. Symbols and frames can serve to unite diverse actors; at the same time, their meanings can be ambiguous and multivalent across different movement constituencies, which allows leaders to attract diverse constituencies that come together behind ambiguous symbols.

Consider the American Civil Rights movement. It both built on and tried to transform the traditional American frame of rights. Americans instinctively frame their demands in terms of rights, but for African Americans, rights most often have been honored in the breach. However, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s drew centrally upon this frame, which then became the “master frame” of many other movement sectors during the cycle of contention of the 1960s (Snow and Benford 1992).

The first reason for the dominance of the rights frame was that the earliest terrain of the Civil Rights movement was the courts. As Charles Hamilton writes, this context “created a cadre of constitutional lawyers who became in a real sense the focal points of the civil rights struggle” (1986: 244). A second reason was more strategic: Equal opportunity was a useful bridge between the movement’s main internal constituency, the southern black middle class, and the white liberal “conscience constituents,” whose support the movement wanted. For the black middle class, equality of opportunity was a worthy enough goal, while white liberals were most offended by the contradiction between the value Americans place on rights and the denial of equal opportunity to African Americans.

But was the Civil Rights movement’s concept of “rights” no more than the traditional costume of American consensus? If so, why did the movement have to await the 1960s to act, and how did it achieve as much as it did? The answer is that only through “bricolage” between the traditional rights frame and the new and innovative forms of nonviolent collective action did rights become the central collective action frame of the movement (Chapter 5 and Tarrow 1992). Using this combination, the movement’s leaders elaborated a practice of militant quiescence within the most traditional institution they possessed – the black Church. It was not the inherited grammar of rights but the combination

of this traditional frame with the creative action of nonviolent resistance that turned quiescence into action.

### Costumes of Consensus

But there is a paradox in the bricolage of inherited and creative movement framing: between developing dynamic symbols that can bring about change, and evoking symbols that are familiar to people who are rooted in their own cultures. Gregory Maney and his collaborators described the relationship between inherited symbols of consensus and oppositional frames of challenge in the antiwar movement in the United States before and after the watershed of the Iraq War in 2003. As public anger at the September 11th attacks rose, the antiwar movement faced a dilemma: Opposing every aspect of the government’s rush to war in Iraq would condemn the movement as un-American; supporting the war would undercut the movement’s basic ideology. The solution of the main trunk of the antiwar movement was to embrace nationalist identities in the months after 9/11, but to revert to pre-9/11 patterns after the Iraq War began (Maney et al. 2009).

In the months following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Maney and his collaborators found a persistent attempt by peace movement leaders to “harness hegemony” – as opposed to “challenging hegemony.” But as the misrepresentations of the Bush-Cheney administration about weapons of mass destruction became ever more evident, the body bags began returning from Iraq, and after the disclosures of torture at Abu Ghraib, the antiwar movement leaders began, in the words of Maney et al., “challenging hegemony.” They found that during periods of massive public sympathy and support for the government – for example, immediately after 9/11 and following the successful invasion of Iraq in 2003 – the peace movement tended to emphasize symbols of hegemony. In contrast, after the Iraq War turned into a quagmire, the movement emphasized symbols that “challenged hegemony.”

Why does it seem so difficult to construct truly oppositional symbols that challenge hegemony? One reason may be that movement leaders genuinely wish to remain within the boundaries of a political consensus – this was certainly true of most of the American peace protesters. Another is that the reach of the state is so great that even messages of rupture are often framed in terms of consensus. But a third reason relates more directly to the structure of communication in today’s societies: Movements that wish to communicate with a broader public must have the internal resources to “perform” protest (Glenn 1997; Meyer and Gamson 1995), or they must use the media to do so, and the media are often allergic to the framing of issues that appear to challenge political consensus.

### Media Framing

Although first the press and then radio have been highly influential in the construction of contention, it was television with its unique capacity to

encapsulate complex situations in compressed visual images that brought about a revolution in movement tactics. The extent of this revolution first became evident during the 1960s in the American Civil Rights movement. That movement, write Richard Kielbowicz and Clifford Scherer, “was television’s first recurring news story largely because of its visual elements” (1986: 83). The coincidence of the movement’s appearance with on-site TV newscasting helped it in three ways: first, television brought long-ignored grievances to the attention of the nation, and particularly to viewers in the North; second, it visually contrasted the peaceful goals of the movement with the viciousness of the police; and third, television was a medium of communication for those *within* the movement. TV helped to diffuse information on what the Civil Rights movement was doing through the visual demonstration of how to sit-in at a lunch counter, how to march peacefully for civil rights, and how to respond when attacked by police and fire hoses.

Similarly, but with more violent results, broadcasting by the media of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in India helped to diffuse the legitimacy of violence and stoked the riots that followed across the country (Jaffrelot: 458). Television was a co-producer of collective action. As two scholars of the media’s effect on movements conclude, “for members of the audience whose own experiences resemble those of the televised cases, such media attention can serve to cultivate a collective awareness, laying the groundwork for a social movement” (Kielbowicz and Scherer: 81).

Religious figures have become adept at using the media to diffuse their political messages. From France, the Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers used radio and cassettes to diffuse their anti-Western critique of the Shah of Iran’s government; in America, Christian fundamentalists broadcast their messages using television and radio from venues as diverse as the pulpits of neighborhood churches and the gridirons of football stadiums; in the 1990s, Islamist terrorist groups began to use media messages to diffuse their versions of religiosity across the Islamic world; and in 2010, a little-known Florida minister used television to broadcast his intention to burn a stack of Qu’rans on the anniversary of September 11th. His publicity stunt failed, but only after the President, the Defense Secretary, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, and platoons of religious figures begged him to desist (*New York Times*, September 11, 2010, p. 1).

The most dramatic example of the role of the media in framing contention was the staging of a massive demonstration by Chinese students in Tiananmen Square in 1989 in protest against Communist Party corruption and authoritarianism (Esherrick and Wasserstrom 1990). Students not only drew on traditional symbols of Chinese political theater, but as in other episodes of the 1989 revolutions, they used theatrical forms strategically to gain the sympathy of the international media audience, which they knew represented their only hope of putting external pressure on Chinese authorities (Calhoun 1994a: Chapter 3). The monument to freedom that they rolled onto the square had roots in Chinese political culture, but it also had a disarming resemblance to the Statue of Liberty.

The media provide a diffuse source for consensus formation that movements on their own cannot easily achieve in that they provide differential “standing” for different actors in a conflict (Ferree et al. 2002). New information and new ways of interpreting it often appear first in public space, only later giving rise to collective action frames on the part of movement entrepreneurs. Once formed, movements can take advantage of coverage by sympathetic journalists (Gitlin 1980: 26). More often, however, the media choose to frame a story in a certain way because it sells newspapers or attracts viewers. At least in a capitalist society, the media are in business to report on the news, and they stay in business only if they report on what will interest readers, or on what editors believe will interest them.

Media framing tends to focus on what “makes” news. This reinforces the shift from disruption to violence often found in protest cycles (Gans 1979: 169). The single student in a peaceful antiwar protest who throws a rock at a police line and the transvestite marching in garish drag in a gay rights march make better copy than well-dressed marchers, no matter how many, parading peacefully down a city street. In this way, the media “accentuate the militant strains found in any collection of activists” (Kielbowicz and Scherer: 86), providing incentives for disruptive or violent elements in otherwise peaceful movements.

#### CRYSTALLIZING IDENTITIES

In Year V of the French Revolution, writes historian Lynn Hunt, the commissioner of the revolutionary executive power in Grenoble wrote:

It is a contravention of the constitutional charter . . . to insult, provoke, or threaten citizens because of their choice of clothing. Let taste and propriety preside over your dress; never turn away from agreeable simplicity. . . . Renounce these signs of rallying, these *costumes of revolt*, which are the uniforms of an enemy army.<sup>5</sup>

The commissioner was in a position to know. In the decade in which he wrote, the French produced the first systematic attempts to reshape political culture around new forms of dress, holidays, salutations, public works, and monuments.<sup>6</sup> As the Revolution spread, so did its symbols. Self-declared republicans wore austere dress to mark them off from “aristocrats,” which came to mean anybody who wore elegant dress and refused to display the signs of republican virtue (Hunt: 1984: 75–76). Supporters of the Revolution would challenge citizens who dared to be seen on the street in elegant dress; even the

<sup>5</sup> Archives Nationales, III Isère 9, Correspondance, 1791–1853, “Adresse du Commissaire du pouvoir exécutif près l’administration centrale du département de l’Isère.” Quoted by Lynn Hunt in her *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (984: 52).

<sup>6</sup> The most thorough treatment of the festivals of the French Revolution is Mona Ozouf’s *Festivals and the French Revolution* (1988). The symbol of Marianne, goddess of liberty and the Republic, has been magnificently studied by Maurice Aghulon in his *Marianne au combat* (1979).

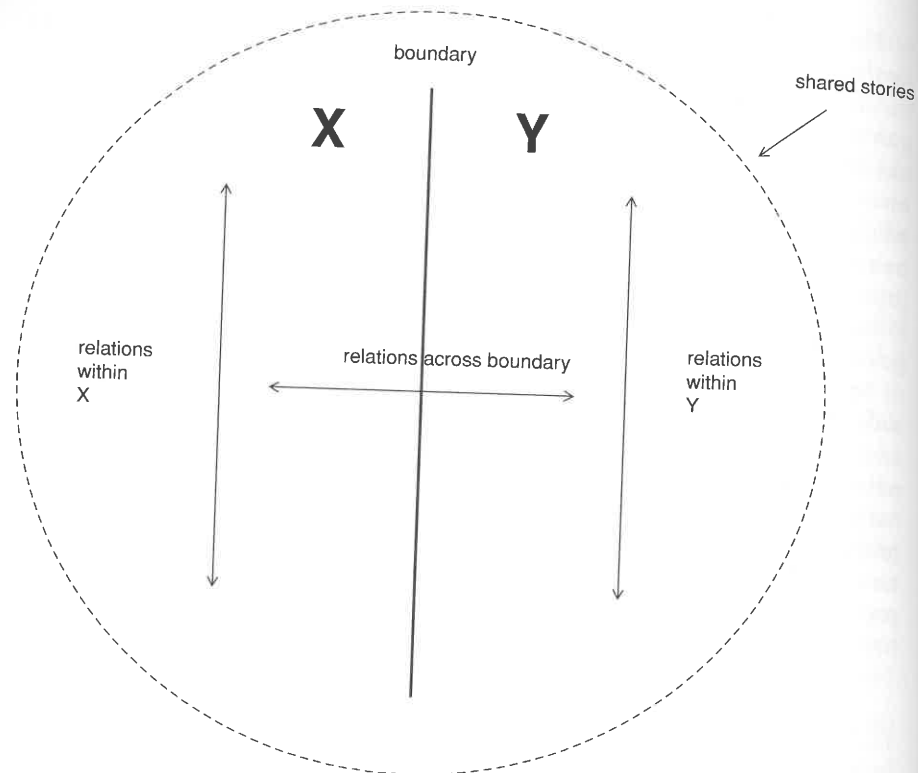


FIGURE 7.2. Boundaries, Ties, and Identities. Source: Charles Tilly, *Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties*, p. 8. Copyright © 2005 Paradigm Press. Reprinted with permission.

King had a Phrygian bonnet stuck on his head before he lost it after the failure of his flight to Varennes (Schama 1988: 603–604).

The story that Hunt tells about the “costumes of revolt” in the French Revolution reveals how contentious politics constructs, crystallizes, and politicizes collective identities.<sup>7</sup> As Tilly writes, “A crucial set of identities is categorical; it pivots on a line that separates Xs from Ys, establishing distinct relations of Xs to Xs, Xs to Ys, and Ys to Ys” (2005: 61). Between identities are boundaries, whether spatial, gender- or class-based, ethnic, religious, and so forth. Figure 7.2 lays out this simple paradigm from Tilly’s work on the relations among identities, ties, and boundaries.

<sup>7</sup> The locus classicus of collective identity theory is found in Alberto Melucci’s *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (1996). Issues of identity formation in social movements are central to several major collections in the social movement field: Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans’ *Social Movements and Culture* (1995), Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston and Joseph Gusfield’s *New Social Movements* (1994), and Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller’s *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (1992).

Categorical identities are overlapping and multiple; the same individual who is a mother at home may be a worker in the factory, a union member in the hiring hall, a bowler in the bowling league, and a protester on the street. That is often far too pluralistic a set of identities around which to mobilize a challenge to powerful enemies. Movements must often struggle to politicize the meaning of identities and to activate boundaries, as the Hindu nationalists did when they strove to militarize the image of the god Ram and portray Muslims as aggressors. This is why movements often try to suppress identities that fit badly with their goals, trying instead to create what Mische calls “provisional homogeneity along a reduced identity dimension” (2008: Chapter 10).

The Hindu nationalists were not alone: German National Socialists built boundaries between themselves and other “races” based on their own supposed “Aryan” superiority and on the degenerate characteristics of Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs. When they settled in Palestine, European Zionists fought to discard the image of the Eastern European Jew as urban, mercantile, and designing for a new one that would be agrarian, productive, and courageous. Similarly, Islamist militants construct boundaries between the true faith of the Prophet and the westernization of Arab government elites. And American nativists – many of foreign origin – rail against the supposed inferiority of undocumented immigrants from South of the border.

Perhaps the best documented effort at identity change was that of American civil rights leaders who worked to create a new and more positive image of “the new negro” in a community in which lightness of skin color had been seen as a sign of status. As Martin Luther King wrote after the Montgomery bus boycotts,

Our non-violent protest in Montgomery is important because it is demonstrating to the Negro, North and South, that many of the stereotypes he has held about himself and other Negroes are not valid. . . . In Montgomery we walk in a new way. We hold our heads in a new way (quoted in McAdam et al. 2001: 319).

The implication was clear: The movement was more than an instrumental effort to change the bus seating laws in Montgomery; it was working to create more generally a new collective identity among Southern blacks.

Movements require solidarity to act collectively and consistently; constructing identities around its claims is one way of doing so. Thus, feminists identify themselves not with a particular program of reforms, but with women’s oppressed fate since the dawn of time; climate change campaigners present themselves as representatives of the interests of humanity; and well-paid, skilled “aristocrats of labor” identified themselves as the suffering proletariat. Sometimes the myths create what Tilly calls “lineaments of durable connection among core participants.” “But,” he concludes, “most social movements remain far more contingent and volatile than their mystifications allow” (Tilly 1998: 133). For example, as Israeli society evolved from scattered *kibbutzim*



and *moshavim* defending their perimeters from Palestinian attackers to a military/industrial powerhouse, the myth of the intrepid farmer making the desert bloom gave way to a new image of a high-tech, high-income country.

Although such identity claims are often the outward apparel that movements wear to mark their members off from others, the solidarity of their militants is often based on more intimate and specialized solidarities, such as the “communities of discourse” that Mary Katzenstein found among American Catholic women (1995); or the workplace solidarity that Rick Fantasia noted among the workers he studied (1988); or the community solidarity that Paul Lichterman described in the community group he studied in California (1996). Often a movement has to negotiate among a variety of identity claims. For example, in his research on Hartford’s progressive community, Stephen Valocchi discovered three different forms of identity: movement identity, held by those whose primary identification was with the movement culture they had inherited from the 1960s; organizational culture, among those whose primary loyalty was to a movement organization; and what he calls “biographical identity,” among those whose identity was associated with a broad social category (Valocchi 2008: 66).

Building a movement around strong ties of collective identity – whether inherited or constructed or, more often, some combination of the two – does some of the “work” that would normally fall to organization. According to Jo Reger and her collaborators, “Activists are often faced with the task of building solidarity among a diverse membership, which can require very careful, deliberate identity work.” Especially in movements in which identity construction is crucial – such as the women’s, gay men’s, and lesbian movements – “Disagreements about who ‘we’ are – or should be – can become quite costly, taking time and resources away from other activist tasks and even alienating participants or fragmenting the movement” (Reger et al. 2008: 3).

Given the importance of establishing legitimacy and certifying a movement as an authentic representative of the constituency it claims to represent, identity construction is probably most important during the emerging phase of the movement, becomes less important as it is institutionalized, and disappears with the movement’s establishment in speaking for its constituency. But because most individuals negotiate among a variety of identities, the politicized identity that a movement claims may need to be constantly reinforced, especially after mobilization has peaked. Second, competing movement organizations may each claim to be the constituency’s authentic representative, producing competition over identity. Third, toward the ends of protest cycles, militants may raise the walls of their collective identity higher, finding increasingly narrow definitions of identity and rejecting alliances as a form of “selling out” (Chapter 10).

#### DOING EMOTION WORK

Much of the “work” of meaning-making is cognitive and evaluative, that is, identifying grievances and translating them into claims against significant

others. But to maintain solidarity among activists and to transform claims into action, emotion work needs to be done. Emotions, writes Verta Taylor, are the “site for articulating the links between cultural ideas, structural inequality, and individual action” (1995: 227). She writes, “it is emotions that provide the ‘heat,’ so to speak, that distinguishes social movements from dominant institutions” (p. 232).

Nationalism is a ready source of emotional energy. Lacking the fine mechanical metaphors of class dialectics, it possesses a great emotional potential, especially when it is linked to religious or ethnic appeals. As Benedict Anderson ironically asks, while contrasting the many monuments to nationalism with the lack of memorials to social class, “Could one even imagine a Tomb of the Unknown Marxist”? (1991: 10). Feminism has also led to recognition of the force of emotionality in social movements. “Scholars of the women’s movement,” writes Verta Taylor, “have pointed to both the love and caring, on the one hand, and the anger, pain, and hostility, on the other, that characterize feminists’ interactions” (1995: 229).<sup>8</sup> But as the story at the beginning of this chapter suggests, it is though religion that “hot cognitions,” infused with emotion, reinforce or create solidarity and produce the most volatile and even violent movements.

#### The Muhammad Cartoons

On September 30, 2005, a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published twelve satirical cartoons of the prophet Muhammad, ostensibly as a protest against what the paper believed was self-censorship on the part of the Danish press out of fear of repercussions from Islamist extremists.<sup>9</sup> Protests by Muslims living in Denmark, who make up four percent of the population in that small country, were immediate. These reactions to the cartoons were restrained and led to no violence. But after two months of relative silence, punctuated by a letter of protest from ambassadors from Muslim countries to the Danish prime minister, protest began to grow, with twenty protests in December, twenty-four in January, more than one hundred in February, and more than sixty in March (Lindkilde 2008: 225). Seventeen different Muslim organizations were direct claim makers in Denmark alone, while another 27, primarily local ones, were indirectly involved (p. 227).

More surprising, this Danish-based protest movement escalated to the transnational level, and this time the protests were far from peaceful. As Thomas Olesen writes, “The images that linger are those of embassies on fire and angry crowds burning Danish flags.” In contrast to the Danish

<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, Leila Rupp’s “Imagine My Surprise” (1980) and Barbara Ryan’s *Feminism and the Women’s Movement* (1992).

<sup>9</sup> My main sources for this narrative are Olesen (2007) and Lindkilde (2008). For the cartoons themselves, which were subsequently republished all over the world, go to [www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=12156](http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=12156). Accessed March 11, 2010.

government, which responded to the protests with firm, if flagging support for freedom of the press, Middle Eastern governments were ambivalent. In several countries, state-controlled newspapers were sharply critical of the Danish government, calling for a boycott of Danish goods and condemning the cartoons as “a crime against the Muslim world” (Olesen 2007: 42). Demonstrations were held in Egypt, Palestine, Yemen, Indonesia, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran, and the Philippines, with arson attacks against Danish offices in Damascus and Beirut (p. 44). Death threats and rewards for the assassination of the cartoonists followed, and several were forced temporarily into hiding.

### Different Emotion Cultures

Sociologist Arlie Hochschild has pointed out that particular groups form their own “emotion cultures” (1990). This has given rise to a rich tradition of quasi-ethnographic research on “emotion work” (Aminzade and McAdam 2001; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, ed. 2002; Gould 2009; Jasper 1998; Polletta 2006), with particular emphasis on religion, gender, and nationalism. Movements often attempt to stimulate particular emotional responses by talking about them (Gould 2009). By saying “we are not afraid, one can become less afraid; by saying ‘we are angry,’ one can feel angry.”

Some emotions – such as love, loyalty, and reverence – clearly are more mobilizing than others – such as despair, resignation, and shame. Some – such as anger – are “vitalizing,” while others – such as resignation or depression – are “de-vitalizing.” Optimism and confidence are frequent accompaniments to protest, but so are anger, indignation, fear, compassion, and a sense of obligation (Polletta and Amenta 2002: 305). Many movements are built around the deliberate cultivation of hatred or anger. The long and tortured struggle between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland cannot be understood, except as the deliberate stoking of mutual hatreds. The rape of Muslim women by Bosnian Serbs was aimed at least as much at desensitizing their own soldiers as it was at humiliating their victims (Eisenstein 1996: 167). Even racial pride – cultivated by a sector of the Black Power Movement in the United States in the 1960s – involved formalized expressions of verbal violence (Gitlin 1995: Chapter 1).

Much depends on the constituent base of the movement, on the emotion culture of the society in which it emerges, on the phase of the movement’s development, on its interaction with significant others, and on surrounding opportunities and constraints. High points of contention may produce emotional pivots around which the future direction of a movement turns. Over time, movement entrepreneurs will strain to re-evolve these emotional pivots through rhetoric, ritual, and gathering at the sites of injustice or of past victories. For example, movements against anti-immigration laws in France often re-evolve the memory of the deportation of Jews and others by the wartime Vichy regime by marching from the Gare de l’Est, which was their point of debarkation to the gas furnaces.

But emotion cultures are never as simple as “one movement = one emotion.” During different phases of their life cycles, movements draw on a broad repertoire of emotions (Aminzade and McAdam 2001). For example, Deborah Gould’s analysis of the lesbian/gay community’s response to AIDS ranges from fear of repression to shame to initial repression of anger, followed by pride in the community, and, finally, anger, when conventional tactics appeared ineffective in gaining government support for victims of the disease (Gould 2009; Aminzade and McAdam, p. 35). Student movements are particularly expressive of a wide range of emotions over their life cycles, ranging from enthusiasm and solidarity in their early phases, to anger and outrage at the indifference of authorities and the brutality of the police at their heights, to despair and burnout during their decline.

But even this is too simple a picture of the repertoire of emotions in movement cycles. Movements mobilize emotions not in a vacuum but in relation to significant others:

- To movement allies whose emotion culture may be very different from that of the movement’s primary constituency
- To bystander publics that the movement may wish to attract by toning down its emotional temperature
- To the media, which movement leaders know to be indifferent to emotional subtleties but alert to extreme expressions of emotion that will attract readers or viewers
- To the forces of order whose repressive tactics may goad the movement’s militants into acts of revenge
- And to public officials, whose indifference to the movement’s goals may lead to anger or disillusionment, or both

### CONCLUSIONS

The “cultural turn” in social science has enriched the repertoire of social movement scholars by bringing framing, identity construction, and emotions to the center of attention. But it will do more harm than good if it results in a species of paradigm warfare in which emotion is chosen over rationality, identity politics over instrumental politics, and movement framing over the social construction of broad episodes of contentious politics. Even assuming that the basic language of a movement is its symbolism, how is that message received and interpreted over time and across space among different social subjects? Will it be understood in its original form, like Holy Scripture? Must it be reworked and readdressed to local constituents according to their own preconceptions? Or will it be applied selectively and in combination with indigenous cultural symbols by movement entrepreneurs?

Most important, how does a movement message change in response to the responses of significant others? In 1994, when the Zapatista rebels launched attacks on government forces in Chiapas, Mexico, they drew heavily on the



symbolism of landless peasants everywhere. But when the movement gained resonance in the capital and in North America and Europe, it was mainly as an “indigenous movement,” and the message of movement leaders shifted from peasant-based claims to demands that were heavily inflected with the symbolism of indigenous Indians oppressed by five hundred years of white and mestizo power. The cultural turn is a refreshing departure from the heavy structuralism that had weighted down previous accounts of contentious politics (see Chapter 1), but if it fails to connect framing, identity, and emotion to the political process, it risks becoming every bit as deterministic as its structuralist predecessor.

What is the solution? Framing, identity construction, and emotions cannot be simply read like a “text,” independent of the strategies of movements and the conditions in which they struggle. Out of a cultural reservoir of possible symbols, movement entrepreneurs choose those they hope will mediate among the cultural understandings of the groups they wish to appeal to, their own beliefs and aspirations, and their situations of struggle to create solidarity and animate collective action (Laitin 1988). To relate text to context, the grammar of culture to the semantics of struggle, we need to turn from framing, identity construction, and emotions to how movements intersect with their contexts. We need to examine, in particular, the structure of opportunities and the constraints in which they operate. We turn to this important intersection in the next chapter.

## Threats, Opportunities, and Regimes

### A COLLAPSING REGIME

In the late 1980s, contentious politics arose in the highly centralized and police-and-party controlled Soviet Union. Mark Beissinger documented the rise and dynamics of contentious politics there – which began as a wave of peaceful demonstrations, strikes, and protest marches, but evolved into violent nationalist-inspired riots and militarized conflicts (Beissinger 2002). Figure 8.1 shows what Beissinger found when he employed a protest event analysis to see what was happening during the last years of the Soviet Union:

How could so massive a wave of political contention develop in so centralized a regime after decades of repression? The simplest answer was provided by Alexis de Tocqueville. Because people act on opportunities, he observed, “the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways” (1955: 176–177). Tocqueville was writing of the collapse of the French Old Regime; had he been present two hundred years later, he might well have applied his theory to the Soviet Union. There, as in France in the 1780s, an international power mired in corruption and torpor and unable to compete with a more dynamic market-oriented society (Bunce 1985; cf. Skocpol 1979) sought to reform itself from within. Incoming party secretary Mikhail Gorbachev was convinced that his country could not survive as a world power without reform. As a result, the late 1980s “engendered a process of liberalization that sparked an explosion of organized extra-state political activity” (Fish 1995: 32).

As was to be expected in so centralized a system, liberalization began at the top, with a change in official thinking and policy on both foreign policy and questions of participation and association. Gorbachev had proposed a modest concept of socialist pluralism, which “amounted to de facto toleration of the formation of some small, non-state citizens’ organizations” (Ibid.). But it did not take long for the new possibilities he offered to stimulate more independent initiatives. For example, a group called “Memorial,” dedicated to investigating