

Meaning and Frame Resonance in the Linkage of Social Movement Groups

Comparing Three Mile Island and Fukushima

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1. Aim

This paper examines why some social movement groups successfully create linkage while other groups fail to do so. Past studies of the development and growth of social movements have provided an explanation from a view of structural and cultural factors. The former theory explains the linkage from existing organizations or networks; the latter employ such conceptual devices such as framing, emotions, collective identity, ideology, symbols, and themes. Comparing the anti-nuclear movement that occurred following the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear power plant accident and the 2011 Fukushima nuclear power plant accident, this study explores the prerequisites and conditions with which multiple movement groups create linkages. In the 1979 campaign in the US there was a successful linkage between the national movement organizations and the local movement groups, whereas in the 2011 campaign in Japan, such linkage did not appear to be established. Drawing on the understanding developed in the area of framing theory, I argue that the establishment of such a linkage heavily depends on the extent of frame resonance and that frame resonance is attained through the convergence of meanings attributed to the actions taken by respective movement organizations and groups.

2. Methods

The study is based on the data collected through interviews and texts during January 2012 and August 2013. Text data was taken from interview records (Walsh, 1988), newspaper articles, and also pamphlets, monthly newsletters, posters, and leaflets from anti-nuclear groups. Interviews were conducted to the local groups in Fukushima and Three Mile Island. Drawing on the arguments made by Snow and Benford (1988) on the conditions that affect or constrain framing efforts, I assess the meanings participating groups attribute to their own actions and the extent to convergence/divergence of those meanings, in addition to examining core framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic, motivational) and infrastructural constraints of belief systems.

3. Results

Movements in America presented a simple and clear solution to nuclear issues; “Block the restart of Three Mile Island”. Such framing was not only able to present a new and *seemingly* attainable goal which had clear results to the national level in the anti-nuclear movement but was also able to include the “backyard problem” of local groups. Also by putting blame on the government and electric power company it presented a clear structure of antagonism. Giving a strong sense of direction by pointing out who to blame and what to do, the anti-nuclear movement in America was able to establish a resonance which resulted in a linkage between the local and national level of movements. On the other hand, movements in Japan failed to frame a single “enemy” or a motivation for participation, having diverse and abstract messages such as “anti-capitalism” or “anti-nuclear”. Such framing excluded the on-going and more direct everyday life issues in Fukushima such as “secure of safety of children” and “a fight against social pressure”, which fermented a great divide between the national and local level of movements. As a result anti-nuclear movements in Japan failed to establish a resonance and linkage between local and national movement organizations.

4. Conclusion

The results of the analysis suggest that a successful resonance of frames results in a linkage between movement groups. But for such resonance to occur I emphasize the importance of meaning. Frame resonance is necessary to establish the linkage across social movement groups, and to attain the resonance the convergence of meanings each participating group attribute to their activities is necessary in addition to conditions laid out by framing theory.