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**Aligning Over Time: The Process of Framing
in the Movement to Close the School of the Americas**

Every November a protest aimed at closing the School of the Americas (SOA) draws thousands of supporters to Columbus, Georgia where people of all ages, colors, and religious backgrounds speak out against the hypocrisy and immorality of their government. In 2006, over 20,000 protesters made the journey, demonstrating the successful development and growth of SOA Watch from a one-man mission for international peace and justice to a popular social movement. This growth, while rapid between the years of 1993 and 1997, is founded in decades of the personal observations and reflections of Father Roy Bourgeois. Without his life experiences, dedication, and perseverance, all of which contributed to key decisions concerning the direction and framing of the movement, SOA Watch would not exist. Others could have heard the same call to stop repressive US involvement in Latin America, but it is unlikely that another leader would have framed the movement in the same way. Bourgeois' particular process of integrating Snow and Benford's diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames has determined the momentum and outcome of the movement. The development of these different frames parallels the chronological narrative of Bourgeois' life, making the movement to close the School of the Americas an ideal case study for applying these theoretical claims.

Framing Theory

Framing, as defined by two of its most prominent scholars, "assign[s] meaning to and interpret[s] relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists," (Snow and Benford, 198). It is a process of creating ways to present information and guide tactics that

will encourage the support and involvement of the greatest number of people and lead to the successful completion of movement goals. Snow and Benford divide this process into a typology of three framing tasks that must be addressed in order for a movement to reach a state of consensus mobilization and eventual action. The first, diagnostic framing, seeks to identify the problem behind the discontent driving the social movement as well as find a causality and attribute blame. For example, a movement that wants to end military repression in Latin America cannot act until individual participants agree on the cause of this repression. Prognostic framing considers the diagnosis and proposes a solution that includes a list of what needs to be changed to resolve the problem and strategies, tactics, and specific targets that will be used to reach that goal. Unfortunately, even when movement participants reach consensus on both a problem and a solution, action is not guaranteed. The disconnect between belief in a cause and a lack of direct effects on the personal lives of actors involved creates a need for motivational framing, the third of Snow and Benford's framing tasks, which seeks to provide "a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ... corrective action," (199). Motivational framing encourages participation by presenting a compelling argument for action, making it "related to, but distinctive from, the diagnostic and prognostic components of consensus mobilization" (Snow and Benford, 203). SOA Watch and other peace movements provide excellent examples of motivational framing when they show how US aid to Latin American militaries funds death squads, making it amoral to support such aid. These frames then present inaction as a form of support, implying that action is the only way for individuals to prove their personal morality.

According to Snow and Benford, the integration of these three kinds of frames, known as frame alignment, is essential for successful collective action. In addition, frames determine the size and momentum of a movement depending on their resonance with both participants and potential supporters. Though he was likely not conscious of it, Father Roy Bourgeois came to

understand this theory as he gathered support for his efforts to stop US funding and training of Central and South American war machines. *Disturbing the Peace*, by James Hodge and Linda Cooper, provides a relatively chronological account of Bourgeois' life and his personal journey toward the creation of SOA Watch and the movement to close the School of the Americas. The process of frame development follows a similarly chronological format (see Figure 1). Beginning with his questioning of US foreign policy in Vietnam in 1966, Bourgeois has been cultivating the frames that led to the successes of this movement almost his entire life.

Diagnostic Framing of SOA Watch

One important, recurring motif in Hodge and Cooper's book are Bourgeois' periods of questioning. As events in his life brought him to witness suffering time and again, Bourgeois wondered who or what would cause such pain and why. This identification of the existence of a problem was the beginning of his diagnostic framing process. It started with his personal discomfort with US indifference to the orphans he worked with in Saigon. Later, his work in Bolivia exposed him to more illogical US actions, like the gift of helicopters to a government whose people were praying for wells. The problem, he concluded, could be traced to US aid, military involvement, and foreign policy. However, the diagnosing process did not stop there. The more Bourgeois learned and experienced, the more he refined his definition of the problem he was fighting and what was causing it. Each time a new revelation hit, the priest found a way to reflect; most notable are the times he spent at home following his work in Bolivia and El Salvador, his visits to Trappist monasteries, and his spells in prison. All of these periods in Bourgeois' life were preceded by events he needed to process and all were followed by a clearer vision of purpose, a strong sense of what he was fighting against, and a better idea of who was to blame.

The Prognosis

Throughout the decades of diagnosis, Bourgeois came up with a variety of tactics that he viewed as steps toward a solution to the violence in Latin America. His speeches, documentaries, letters to the editor, protests, and prison sentences were all undertaken with the hope of changing practices in the US military that contributed to torture and subversive warfare in Latin America. Initially, Bourgeois traveled the country recounting the atrocities he had seen, reminding “himself that giving witness, not being effective, was what mattered,” (Hodge and Cooper 142). It was the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Romero in El Salvador by soldiers trained in the United States that focused Bourgeois’ work; instead of attempting to target US foreign policy as a whole, he refined his prognosis and focused on stopping US training of Latin American soldiers in the techniques of low intensity conflict. As the killings in El Salvador continued Bourgeois led hunger strikes and vigils to draw attention to his cause. While others from religious orders joined him in his efforts, it was a slow process and it was not until 1990 that his prognostic framing clicked.

While reading about the ongoing Jesuit case, Bourgeois saw a *Washington Post* column by Colman McCarthy that would soon alter the course of his life. The January 28 [1990] column predicted there would be a show trial of the nine Salvadoran officers in order to keep U.S. aid flowing; he went on to say that the military aid was only part of the U.S. complicity in the country’s long bloodbath. Another component, he said, was the U.S. Army School of the Americas, which was training hundreds of Salvadoran officers at Fort Benning, Georgia. Bourgeois had never heard of the school. (Hodge and Cooper 132)

He cleared his schedule and drove to Georgia where he discovered Salvadorans practicing their aim on human shaped targets. His prognosis suddenly became clear: he had to stop the training taking place at the School of the Americas.

The new prognostic vision guided the movement onto the national stage. Reports in news outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and the *Washington Post* that previously would have been useful only because they linked the US Army to atrocities in Latin America, now

reaffirmed movement goals. Rather than the movement encouraging people to read the articles, the articles now encouraged people to join the movement. This popular mental link between Latin American repression and the SOA meant that when the 1993 UN Truth Commission named 47 SOA graduates on the list of 66 officers cited for major human rights violations during the Salvadoran war, the movement could easily use it as a motivational frame to get people involved in its actions. (Hodge and Cooper 146)

Motivational Frames and Frame Alignment

Despite the ongoing evolution of diagnosis and prognosis, Bourgeois' motivational frames remained fairly constant. Focused on raising awareness of the abuses being funded by US tax dollars and questioning the morality of US foreign policy, Bourgeois limited his motivational tactics to public speaking and media attention via letters to the editor and coverage of his vigils, protests, trials, and prison sentences. His attempts were met with marginal success as he gained the latent support of bystanders and slowly collected participants from the ranks of the clergy and others who had traveled in Latin American and had personal connections to the threat of violence in the region. Response to his call to arms did not take off, however, until the emergence of the more specific prognostic frame that aimed to close the School of the Americas. Because the frame was more focused than previous prognoses that broadly targeted the military, US aid, training of foreign troops, and US foreign policy in general, potential participants could see the eventual goal: the closure of a particular training institute. The more explicit diagnostic and prognostic frames aligned with the motivational frame of action against violence in such a way that all of the frames became more accessible to a general audience and people began to join the movement. These values of morality and social justice had always drawn people to Bourgeois' cause, but before their alignment with a precisely identified problem and solution supporters had difficulty making the connections that led to action. Early hunger strikes and

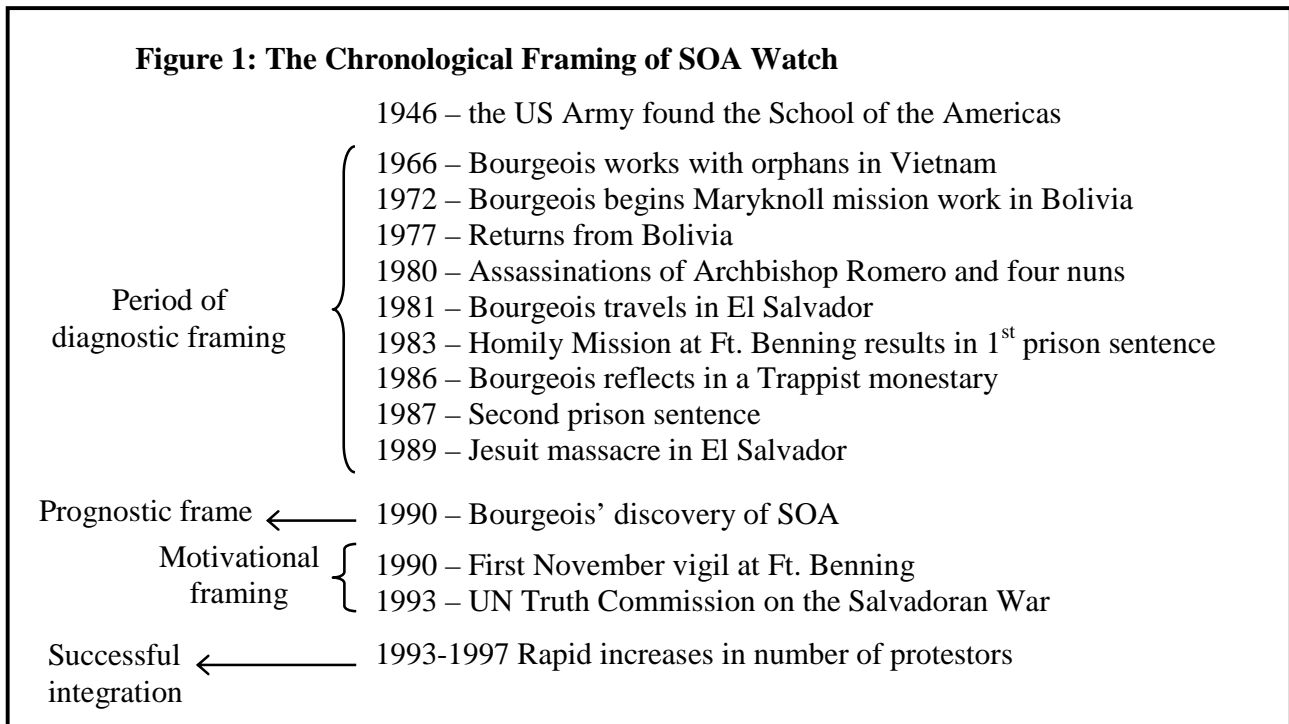
November vigils at Fort Benning showed people a way to channel their desire to act, causing skyrocketing rates of participation between 1993 and 1997.

Evaluating the Theory

Since all of these frames had been in place in some form or another for most of Bourgeois' life, it follows that their integration was what triggered massive support for his movement. The culmination of the framing process in frame alignment finally sparked the creation of SOA Watch, the social movement organization that facilitates the fight to close the School of the Americas today. This supports Snow and Benford's claims that frame alignment is a necessary condition for collective action. Only when problem, solution, and motivation for action intertwine is the framing process complete and only then can frames resonate with potential actors and provide an impetus to action. The increased potential for frame resonance can be attributed to the accessibility of integrated frames; frames that make sense as a logical progression provide better roadmaps to action.

Frame integration as a process of logical progression is made easier if framing tasks are performed in a chronological order. It was not until Bourgeois settled upon a specific diagnosis (e.g. the root cause of the problem is the training done at the SOA) that he was able to finalize a prognosis (close the school) and have it fit within the constraints of the motivational frame (it is amoral to ignore this problem, therefore we must act). Though it took Bourgeois nearly 25 years to fully develop his diagnostic frame, its finalization led to the rapid growth of the movement. His vigils, hunger strikes, and protests did not draw nearly as much support nor incite nearly as much action before the perfected diagnosis as they do now that they represent an integrated set of frames. Sequential frame development is conducive to integration because each framing task should expand on its predecessor. If other movements learned from this case study and

consciously tackled framing tasks in chronological order, perhaps they could more quickly reach a stage where their frames are aligned, accessible, applied, and successful.



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