

Releasing the Waters: A Sociological Study of the Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria

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## ABSTRACT

The anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria, 2011-2012, represents a remarkable case of citizen mobilization against techno-industrial development. The movement merits scholarly interest both as an instance of a larger controversy around a novel technology in a world at an energy crossroads and as a social phenomenon in its own right, with its novelty to the cultural context, its power, its success.

Three studies take three different perspectives on the anti-fracking movement (AFM), aiming, in their combination, to describe and explain how the AFM shaped and was shaped by policy-making in its specific context. The first study advances a conceptual framework, a policy-making process (PMP) model, for the study of social movements (SMs). The study builds on the current accomplishments of SM scholarship and presents an approach that synthesizes important theories and emphasizes issue-focused policy-making. The AFM features as a case illustrating the application of the PMP model. The model allows for the concise description and deeper understanding of a whole SM, and for cross-case comparisons with SMs in other contexts.

The second study focuses on the content and processes of meaning-making in the AFM. It attempts to answer how understandings emerged and developed among activists about the issue, the technology, the threat, and the major actors in the conflict. The analysis of meaning-making is performed and presented in a novel way, reconstructing activist meanings from bounded objects to complex higher-order systems. The study presents findings on the meaning-making mechanisms, the identities, ideologies, discourses, and storylines within the movement, and the relationships among them.

The third study describes and evaluates the internal organization of the AFM as a grassroots democracy. A grassroots democracy lens can help understand how the AFM

mobilized thousands of first-time activists in a society with only fledgling civil structures and networks. Additionally, the study examines how democratic forms helped the AFM community mobilize and sustain participation, while also developing an alternative political process. Findings on the movement-specific forms of power, equality, participation, and consent are presented, with explanations of their origins, legitimacy, and implications for movement actions. The mutual influence and impact of the PMP and movement democracy are examined.

To my father

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This dissertation is the fruit of much effort, a realization of an idea conceived in 2008. Of course, it is a collective effort. My family has been the most important team member, and I am fully indebted to my wife Valeriya for her patience, tolerance, and the ultimate resource: (freed up) time. My parents supported me in a myriad ways, trusting my judgment about the value and sense of the whole PhD enterprise.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
LIST OF FIGURES .....	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xi
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Introduction .....	1
References .....	6
II. THE ANTI-FRACKING MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA: A POLICY-MAKING PROCESS MODEL .....	8
Social Movement Theory .....	9
The Policy-making Process as a Framework for Studying Social Movements .....	10
Institutional and Challenger Policy-making Processes .....	14
Applications and Potential Benefits from the PMP .....	16
The Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria as Empirical Base of Theory Development .....	25
Phases of the AFM's Policy-making Process .....	34
Discussion .....	45
Conclusion .....	46
References .....	49
Appendix 1: Interview Protocol .....	56
III. MEANING-MAKING IN THE ANTI-FRACKING MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA .....	62
Introduction .....	63
Theoretical Framework .....	63
Methods .....	73
Findings .....	76
Discussion .....	114
Conclusion .....	120
References .....	122
Appendix 1: Images in Meaning-making in the Anti-fracking Movement .....	131
IV. DEMOCRACY IN THE ANTI-FRACKING MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA .....	138
Introduction: Democracy and Social Movements .....	139

Theoretical Framework.....	140
Methods.....	151
Findings.....	153
Discussion.....	178
Conclusion.....	184
References.....	186
V. CONCLUSION.....	190
Conclusion.....	190
References.....	195



## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
<b>Chapter II</b>	
1. History of the Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria.....	29
<b>Chapter III</b>	
1. Interpretive Framing of the Main Objects and Actors in the Anti-fracking Movement.....	77

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
<b>Chapter II</b>	
1. The policy-making process.....	12
<b>Chapter III</b>	
1. A protest poster against Chevron. The message is a reference to a famous phrase ascribed to a Bulgarian ruler who repelled a Byzantine invasion into Bulgaria.....	131
2. The anti-fracking movement’s logo: burning water. The text reads, “No to shale gas.”.....	132
3. A movement poster. Female harvesters with gas masks: an example of incongruity. The text reads, “Save Bulgaria! Say no to shale gas!!!” .....	133
4. A movement poster. A bread fractured by a drill: an example of incongruity. The text reads, “Golden Dobrogea?” .....	134
5. A protest poster. Stereotypical American recklessness. The text reads, “Shale gas extraction – Vandal technology, unsuitable for densely populated regions. If you eat bread, this concerns you. Get informed at <a href="http://www.shalegas-bg.eu">www.shalegas-bg.eu</a> ” .....	135
6. A movement leaflet. Lending a voice to the voiceless. The text reads, “Your voice can solve the problem. Inform yourself. Speak your mind. Share with a friend. LEND YOUR VOICE TO THE ENVIRONMENT” .....	136
7. A protest poster. Incongruity of money and drinking water.....	137

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFM	(The) Anti-fracking movement
CAF	Collective action frame
PMP	Policy-making process
PO	Political opportunity
SM	Social movement
SMO	Social movement organization

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background and Significance**

On June 16th 2011, the Bulgarian government announced that Chevron Corporation had been granted a license to explore for shale gas in Bulgaria. The conditions of the contract were and would remain secret. As was later revealed, a host of other large and small gas companies had been invited to bid for licenses covering in total a third of the country – all without any public disclosure or discussion. Shale gas is extracted via a controversial technology called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, which involves horizontal drilling of shale formations and high pressure pumping of vast amounts of water mixed with chemicals into the shales. Fracking has become a major public health issue: it carries significant risks for the air, soil, water, and biodiversity of local communities. There are also negative consequences for community cohesion and safety due to the separate negotiations of royalties between landowners and companies and the influx of outside workers. There are thousands of cases, and now a growing number of peer-reviewed studies, of fracking's risks and detrimental effects on the health and well-being of local communities (e.g. Busby & Mangano, 2017; Cahill et al, 2017; Colborn et al, 2011; Jacquet, 2014; Moore et al, 2014; Vengosh et al, 2014). Fracking has spread rapidly in the United States in the last 20 years, and so has community opposition to it.

Between June 2011 and January 2012 local communities in prospective drilling areas in Bulgaria organized for protests, petitions, and other forms of non-violent action, to stop the tenders and compel the National Parliament to impose a ban on fracking. Fracking, from a completely obscure technology, became a major news topic. Local community organizing efforts grew into a national movement, with over ten thousand people marching on the streets of 12

Bulgarian cities on January 14th 2012. Four days later, the Bulgarian Parliament passed a moratorium on fracking by an overwhelming majority. Despite concerted efforts to nullify this decision in the following months by pro-fracking experts and U.S. officials in Bulgaria, after heated discussions with activists and experts and more protests in the streets, the moratorium was refined and confirmed in June 2012.

The resistance against fracking in Bulgaria and across the globe exemplifies larger tendencies. It demonstrates the increasing difficulties citizens face in their attempts to influence policy: democracy is weakening in a context of withdrawing national states, globalizing corporate powers, and politicized, adversarial expertise. At first sight, the Bulgarian success seems even more surprising as Bulgaria is still evaluated as a “semi-consolidated” democracy<sup>1</sup>, with a fledgling civil society and mass disillusionment with political parties and elections. Therefore, the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria is a valuable opportunity to study important and urgent questions of civic empowerment: How does local reactive protest expand to the arena of national politics and relate to controversies at transnational level? How can lay citizens build and legitimize knowledge that serves policy-making on par with technocratic expertise? How can a movement both correct the shortcomings of liberal democracy and also develop an alternative to it? Ultimately, how can bottom-up policy making achieve desired political outcomes?

### **Study Purposes**

The dissertation is part of a larger study that aims to explore and describe the initiation, development and outcomes of the anti-fracking movement (AFM) in Bulgaria, its major constraints, resources and processes, and to provide tentative explanations of its successes. The project aims to produce findings that can be used in comparative studies of anti-fracking and environmental protests across Europe, North America, and other regions where similar techno-

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<sup>1</sup> According to Freedom House *Nations in Transit 2014* Report.

industrial developments have been proposed and opposed. Second, this inquiry aims to describe a grounded model of a bottom-up, local-to-national movement development that can help civic activists learn from their experience and inform civic action in environmental and other contexts. Third, the study will humanize the movement's participants in the public's perceptions by letting them tell their stories in their own voices. This transparency will hopefully support Bulgaria's democracy and public sphere. Finally, this project will be the first systematic empirical study of an instance of grassroots collective action in Bulgaria. It will attempt to generate culturally grounded local theories about civic action and social movements.

### **General Approach**

The overall investigative approach for the study of the AFM in Bulgaria is case-study research. This framework helps explore, describe and understand problems of interest by using a case as a phenomenon and illustration of these problems (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). However, the AFM is more than an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), i.e. an instance selected to illustrate theoretical constructs of interest. It is also an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995) in which the focus is on the case (the movement) itself because of its unique qualities (first empirical study of a social movement in Bulgaria, unusual strength of mobilization and success) and the two practical purposes of building a grounded model of civic challenge and giving voice to participants. As in a case study design, the AFM is examined as a case within a bounded system. The timeframe is set from its inception in June 2011 (when the first contract with Chevron was announced) until the voting of the final text of the moratorium (June 2012). Some data were collected on events before and after this period, but only to illuminate or help the understanding of the movement itself. The AFM is also bounded within the context of Bulgarian society, with deliberative efforts to understand the influence of context on the movement (Creswell, 2007).

Within the case study framework, different research questions are addressed more flexibly and pragmatically via different analytical methods. The design decisions for the study are shaped by its purposes, conceptual framework, and research questions in an interactive design model (Maxwell, 2012). The complexity of the phenomenon and the lack of prior research in the cultural context determine a versatile approach with exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research questions (Creswell, 2007), applying various methods of data collection and analysis of multiple sources and forms of data, coupled with immersion in the movement's operations. The participation of activists in the navigation of the study was invited and welcomed in phases such as the purposeful sampling of interviewees, the member checking of interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and, as a next step, the discussion and dissemination of findings.

### **The Three Studies**

This dissertation comprises three studies taking different perspective on the AFM. In their combination, the three studies aim to describe and explain how the AFM shaped and was shaped by policy-making in its specific context. The first study advances a conceptual framework, a policy-making process (PMP) model, for the study of social movements (SMs). The study builds on the current accomplishments of SM scholarship (Amenta et al, 2010; McCammon et al, 2008) and presents an approach that synthesizes important theories and emphasizes issue-focused policy-making. The AFM movement features as a case illustrating the application of the proposed PMP model. The model allows for the concise description and deeper understanding of a whole SM. The model is also useful in that it may allow cross-case comparisons between SMs in other contexts.

The second study focuses on the content and process of meaning-making in the AFM. It attempts to answer how understandings emerged and developed among activists about the issue, the technology, the threat, and the major actors in the conflict, including themselves as a diverse group. Collective meaning-making was crucial for the movement's mobilization, the winning of public opinion, and, specifically to the case, for the contentious politics of knowledge around the then-obscure technology. The analysis of meaning-making is performed and presented in a novel way, reconstructing activist meanings from objects to higher-order systems such as discourses and narratives; in addition, meaning-making mechanisms are explored.

The third study describes and evaluates the inner workings of the AFM through a grassroots democracy lens. The AFM mobilized thousands of first-time activists from a fledgling civil society and their organization is a topic of interest in itself. Additionally, the study examines how democratic forms helped the AFM community mobilize and sustain participation, while also developing an alternative political process. The mutual influence and impact of the PMP and movement democracy are examined.



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## CHAPTER II

### THE ANTI-FRACKING MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA: A POLICY-MAKING PROCESS MODEL

This paper presents a theoretical framework for social movement description and analysis that emerged from a study of the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria, 2011-2012. This framework, dubbed a policy-making process model of a social movement, proved useful in putting together the actions of anti-fracking activists and the context and outcomes of the movement. The paper presents the conceptual framework and supports it with examples from the anti-fracking movement, in effect structuring a case study around the model. The paper opens with short reviews of social movement theory, the policy-making cycle, and their prior integrations in the study of social contention. Next, the policy-making process model of a social movement is presented, with discussion of its potential analytical benefits. The paper continues with a description of the empirical base for the case study, and then proceeds with the illustration of the model within the history of the anti-fracking movement.

### **Social Movement Theory**

A social movement is a mass mobilization of citizens for collective actions, partly outside institutionalized channels, for the purpose of demanding changes from institutions in policies, laws or the institutions themselves (Snow & Soule, 2009). Social movements (SMs) are a form of contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001) in the sense that their collective claims conflict with someone else's interests and that governments are either a claimant, an object of claims, a party to the claims or monitors of contention (Tarrow, 2001; Tilly, 2004). This policy-oriented conceptualization will be used as more pertinent to the nature of the anti-fracking movement (AFM) in Bulgaria compared to, for example, New Social Movements (NSM) theories that emphasize networks that challenge existing power arrangements not so much via claims but through a shared conflictual culture and collective identity (Melucci, 1985).

Challengers are outsiders to the polity (Tilly, 1978) meaning that they represent constituencies not previously mobilized (Gamson, 1990), speak on behalf of constituencies that lack formal representation (Tilly, 1984), or employ unconventional tactics (McAdam, 1999). While extrainstitutional tactics are a necessary and defining feature of SMs, all political collective action by a movement must be included in its study (Amenta et al, 2010).

Contemporary SM theory is a successor of several theoretical perspectives focusing on different aspects of contentious politics (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996): political opportunities theory, focused on the importance of political context factors on SM emergence; resource mobilization (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), or more generally SM organization theory (Davis et al, 2005) concerned with the forms, structures, and practices within a collective challenger; framing processes theory (Benford & Snow, 2000), accounting for processes of meaning-making within a movement and around an issue in society; and a focus on grievances and threat as impetuses for mobilization (Snow et al, 1998; Johnson & Frickel, 2011). These threads or perspectives of research have been integrated into comprehensive approaches to the study of SMs such as political mediation (Amenta et al, 2010) and strategic adaptation (McCammon et al, 2008). The policy-making process model that is to be elaborated through the AFM case is another attempt at a synthesis of SM theories (or foci) that advances the political mediation and strategic adaptation approaches into novel directions.

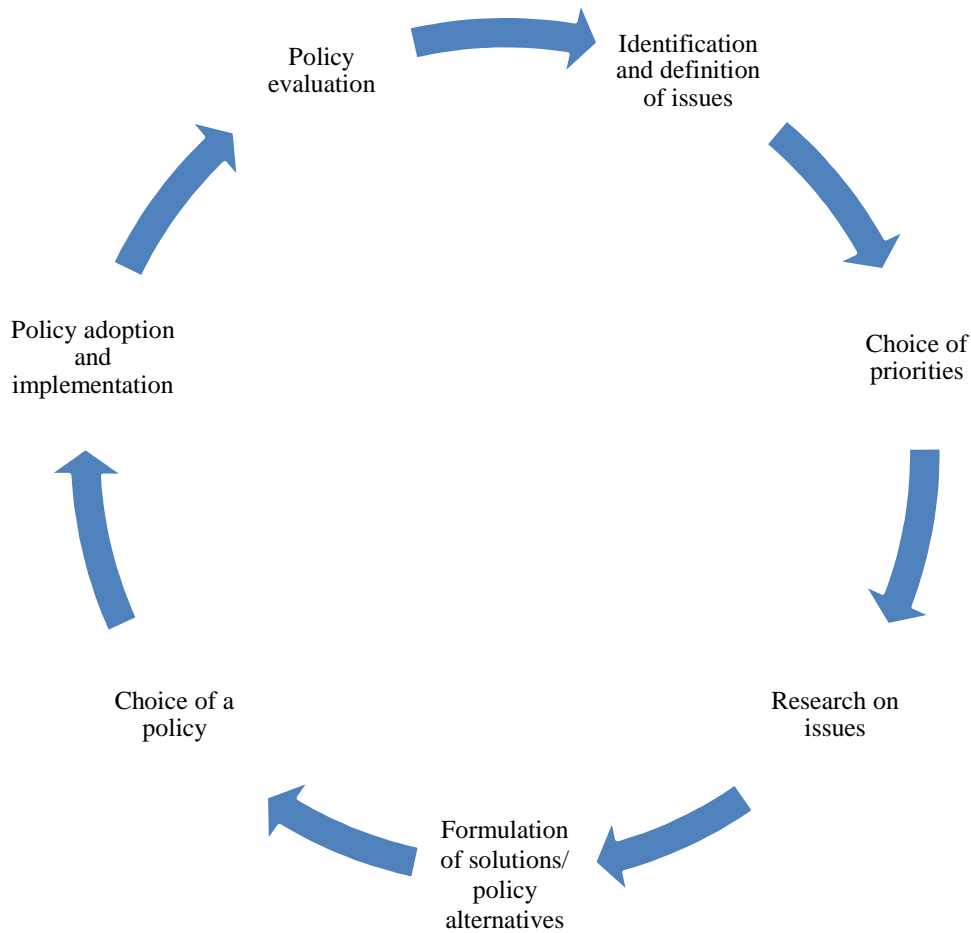
### **The Policy-making Process as a Framework for Studying Social Movements**

#### **The Policy-making Process**

A simplified, summary model of the Policy-making Process (PMP) will be described based on policy cycle theory (Fischer, Miller, & Sidney, 2007). The model is grounded on a problem-orientation assumption of public policy, viz. that policy is a solution response to social

issues (Smith & Larimer, 2009). State policies are “authoritative and consistent lines of action undertaken by states, backed by laws and the legitimacy of states” that can take diverse forms ranging from short-term action to highly institutionalized programs with many laws and bureaucratic institutions to support them (Amenta et al, 2002, p. 67). This orientation to policy-making is admittedly narrow, reducing policy to the administration of occurring (and recurring) social issues, and disguising moral dilemmas under institutional rationalities of optimal solutions (vs. resolutions) and efficiency (Fischer, 2000; Rittel & Webber, 1973). However, using such a policy framework is helpful in the case of a single-issue, reactive and policy-oriented movement such as the AFM in Bulgaria.

The PMP model is presented in Figure 1; it is conceptualized here into seven phases. This level of detail is most suitable for the case of the AFM. For example, phases 1 and 2 are treated in some analyses as Agenda Setting (Fischer et al, 2007), but in the AFM case under study, defining the issue (phase 1) and its forceful introducing as a priority into the political agenda (phase 2) should be examined as two distinct processes. The schematic might leave the impression of a strict succession of the stages; however, the term “phases” is used purposively to underscore that policy-making can move back and forth between phases, and that policy work on different phases can be done simultaneously. Short descriptions of each phase follow.



*Figure 1:* The policy-making process.

**Identification and definition of issues.** Social problems are social constructions; what social phenomenon becomes an issue, a problem, is the first important question in the PMP process (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996). It is a matter of awareness, cognitions, and values. Not only must a phenomenon gain the status of a problem, but it should also be framed as a public-sphere issue; something to be addressed by collective effort. The framing of issues depends to a great extent on the dominant ideologies in society, as a problem is the discrepancy between a desired and an actual state of affairs (Fischer, 2000).

**Choice of priorities.** A phenomenon might have been recognized as a social issue, but then it must compete for public and political attention and resources with many other social

issues. Why is it more important or urgent than other issues? This phase is even more crucial in younger democracies like Bulgaria, where regulations and institutions are preoccupied with constant reforms, social problems are many, and resources are scarce. A perfect illustration of the priority hurdle for an issue is the agenda of Parliament, where the busy pipeline of laws and regulations must be interrupted to introduce a new issue.

**Research on issues.** The goal of this phase is to collect extensive information and to conduct systematic inquiry into the causes, conditions, forms, prevalence, experience, and consequences of the issue in focus. Such activities are usually the domain of experts and expert knowledge (Fischer, 2000).

**Formulation of solutions/policy alternatives.** Research usually produces information for the possible solutions of the social issues. Similar to phases 1 and 2, this is a point of competition with other issues for resources or between solutions and the interest groups promoting them that can win or lose, sometimes for a mere word in the formulation. Also, prevailing ideologies about the role of the state and other social actors influence the shaping of alternatives. A solution describes new practices, regulations, institutions, markets or agents that would address the issue.

**Choice of a policy/solution.** The choice can be seen as the final act of policy formulation and the first of policy adoption (Fischer et al, 2007). It is conceptualized as a separate phase because of the formal and ritualized ways of making the choice, for example through highly publicized voting in Parliament or in a referendum.

**Policy adoption and implementation.** The next two phases are usually the realm of professional bureaucrats or public administrators. The success of a policy depends on the quality



of its introduction and implementation, which include diverse and complex activities from information dissemination to education and training.

**Policy evaluation.** Finally, the policy is evaluated against measures of achieving its goals, to wit solving the social issue that begat it. In this crucial phase, learning from policy implementation becomes possible, and implications for correction and improvement in the policy are made. The policy cycle comes to a closure and starts again as issues arise from the policy implementation and its intended and unintended consequences.

### **Institutional and Challenger Policy-making Processes**

The adoption of a PMP framework for a social movement is not entirely new, although it is indeed rare. Most SM studies of policy change have focused on the final adoption of a policy as a dichotomous outcome, which begets criticism (Soule & King, 2006). An early predecessor of such models is Schumaker's (1975) five stages of policy responsiveness to citizen demands: access responsiveness, agenda responsiveness, policy responsiveness, output responsiveness, and impact responsiveness. Even studies that use a more elaborate PMP framework focus on a segment of the process, most often the entry, formulation, and passage of legislation (Amenta et al, 2010; Burstein & Linton, 2002; King, Cornwall, & Dahlin, 2005; Soule & King, 2006). Amenta and his colleagues also add implementation to the PMP (2010), while Andrews and Edwards (2004) use an eclectic model of policy process dimensions (not phases) with agenda setting, access to decision-making arenas, achieving favorable policies, monitoring and shaping implementation, and shifting the long-term priorities and resources of political institutions. The PMP framework was used in the cited studies for various purposes: for distinguishing between different political opportunities at different stages, for example claiming that rules become more stringent and exclusionary at later stages of legislation and therefore public opinion and protest

are more influential at early stages (Amenta et al, 2010; King et al, 2005; Soule & King, 2006); or for refining the evaluation of policy outcomes as not just passage of a policy legislation, but also agenda setting, introduction, content, etc. (Amenta, 2006; Andrews, 2001; Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Burstein & Linton, 2002).

The first novel feature of the PMP model proposed here is the fuller elaboration of policy-making as encompassing all seven phases described above. The second advancement is that I propose using a PMP framework to study not just a variable such as outcome or PO, but the whole complex of SM concepts as shaped by the phase of the PMP: POs, strategy, tactics and organizational forms, framing processes, and political outcomes. This comprehensive approach is pertinent to the study of a case of activism such as the AFM in Bulgaria. The most elaborate model I found is in Soule and King's (2006) study of the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment, where they used the stage of legislation as a moderating variable between the independent variables SM organization, public opinion, and POs, and two possible outcomes.

The biggest conceptual step proposed here is the separation of institutional and challenger PMPs. While previous studies examine SM activity and outcomes as SMs participate in the institutional policy-making (hence the emphasis on legislation), I attempt to look at a challenger PMP happening in parallel and in interaction with the institutional PMP. In other words, instead of asking, how activists influence the content of legislation, I would ask: How do activists formulate policy alternatives and how do they introduce their formulations in legislation? How do they do research on the issue and how does their research compare to expertise summoned by institutions? Or, how do they define and interpret the issue, and how is their definition reflected in the institutional diagnosis of the problem? Such an approach makes easier the move away from a pure legislative process, and the inclusion of traditional SM topics of interests such as

framing processes or organization. SM development can be studied with a finer lens and greater agency ascribed to the challenger (McCammon et al, 2008).

### **Applications and Potential Benefits from the PMP**

I will present here brief suggestions for the use of the challenger PMP framework for examining political opportunities, SM strategy and actions, framing processes, and outcomes.

#### **Political Context**

The term “political opportunity” (PO) was introduced by Eisinger (1973) in order to explain why some US cities had riots in the 1960s while others did not. His hypothesis was that the openness of the local polity encouraged protest. Tarrow (1994) defined POs as “consistent — but not necessarily formal or permanent — dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (p. 85). This understanding reflects the need to transcend criticisms of strain theories (relating SMs to breakdowns in social structures) and explain why protest is rare while discontent is constant and ubiquitous (McAdam, 1999). However, the definition had to be expanded as scholars realized that political contexts that facilitate mobilization do not necessarily aid political influence (Amenta et al, 2010). The dependent variables can be mobilization, but also SM strategy and tactics, organizational forms, and policy outcomes (McAdam, 1996; Meyer, 2004; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). In addition, political context became a more adequate term to capture not just facilitative, but also unfavorable conditions that shape a SM (Amenta et al, 2010; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Piven & Cloward, 1977). If the early definition of POs can be described with the metaphor of the dam (of discontent) where a crack (an opportunity) leads to an outpouring, the later concept of political contexts and outcomes is more like a river (the movement) shaped by the political landscape.

There are many conceptualizations of POs and a useful summarizing was done by McAdam (1996). He reviewed four scholars' work and summarized four dimensions of POs: relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, the stability or instability of elite alignments in the polity, the presence or absence of elite allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression. McAdam chose to leave out the policy-making capacity of the government as a PO. This dimension has been asserted by several scholars (e.g. Kitschelt, 1986; Rucht, 1996; Tarrow, 1988). Policy implementation capacity is the power of authorities to implement adopted policies, regardless of internal or external resistance. State capacity is related to the degree of centralization of the state apparatus, the government control over market participants, the independence of the executive from the judiciary branch (Kitschelt, 1986), the penetration of geographical peripheries, the standardization of state practices, and the sophistication of the means of policy implementation (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001).

With the expansion of the PO concept and the introduction of political context emerges the question of the boundaries between political and other facilitative contexts. McAdam (1994) and Gamson and Meyer (1996) discuss cultural opportunities such as dominant values and world-views in society, zeitgeist, class-consciousness and media representation. McCammon, Campbell and Granberg (2001) studied gendered opportunity structures as facilitators of policy change in favor of women's rights and found that shifting gender relations indeed influenced the attitudes of policy makers. Noonan (1995) described how women were able to openly mobilize and protest in the authoritarian context of Pinochet's Chile because of the framing opportunity provided by a motherhood value supported by the conservative government. Finally, economic opportunity structures are also important (Wahlstrom & Peterson, 2006), when economic actors are either targets or interested parties in a challenge.

Within a PMP model, the analysis of the political context should begin with the question of where, or at what phase, the issue taken up by a movement stands along the policy-making cycle. Furthermore, openness as a dimension of POs can be defined more specifically as the openness of the institutional PMP at each phase of the specific issue. This conceptualization is consistent with a policy-specific opportunity structure (Tarrow, 1996). Access points to formal policy-making can be examined at each phase, as points in a process, instead of as windows in institutions (Brockett, 1991). Inclusion or exclusion of citizens from policy-making can be formal, or a matter of degree measured by amount of interactions with powerful actors (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Political access opportunities can also be examined via the PMP if we analyze the formal rights of citizens to create policies. For example, mechanisms for citizen participation are common at issue identification and definition (e.g. public councils or hearings), choice of policy (e.g. referenda), and policy implementation (e.g. non-profit service provision) phases. Policy adoption and policy implementation capacities feature prominently and separately in the PMP model (as an issue-specific capacity). While the former is a more of a legal possibility (is the issue within the executive branch's purview and state's regulative power), the latter is also a matter of actual capacity, which can be weak due to problems like corruption, lack of necessary expertise, or a double institutional agenda where the state meets citizens' demands formally, but does not enforce the policy because of other actors' interests. This aspect of implementation capacity is neglected in studies of political contexts of SMs. It is also worth noting the expanded possibilities that the analytic inclusion of the phase of research on issues provides for the study of exclusivity. Access to policy-making is limited through the use of scientific, value-neutral discourse in issue diagnostics (research) and policy development (Brulle, 2000; Fischer, 2000). Overcoming this hurdle is a major task for mobilized citizens.

## **Strategy and Tactics**

A movement is a challenger to a status quo; the agency of activists should be examined through the strategic and tactical choices they make as they perceive and evaluate, act upon, and shape their political context (McCammon et al, 2008). Older models of movement capacity focus on internal organizational characteristics and resources (McCammon et al, 2008). Newer models of political mediation suggest the need for a matching of movement capacity and political context (Amenta et al, 2010). Strategic adaptation models (McCammon et al, 2008) move a step further by putting the emphasis on the deliberate activities of activists to adapt their strategies and tactics to the political environment: by perceiving and interpreting signals from other actors, planning and implementing the most effective tactics, observing their effects, and ultimately learning from the movement's experience. The PMP model will attempt to elaborate the political mediation and strategic adaptation models with the introduction of the policy-making process as a tool of analysis.

Political mediation addresses the crucial question of how exactly movements influence institutions and elected officials to change or adopt policy (Amenta et al, 2010; Andrews, 2001; Giugni & Passy, 1998). This posing of the problem is within the debate of state-centered vs. society-centered explanations of impact. The political process model reflects the return of the state as an autonomous agent in policy-making. Political institutional theory is the current elaboration of a state-centered analysis of political decision-making (Amenta, 2005). The theory posits the state as an agent with autonomy to define policies and the capacity to carry out decisions (Amenta, 2005). States can influence political outcomes directly, as political players, and indirectly, as they structure the relationships between other actors and their political initiatives. Political mediation models of SM impact (Amenta, Caren, & Olasky, 2005; Amenta

et al, 2010) elaborate political institution theory by positing that SMs need the help of mediators, institutional political actors such as elected officials and state bureaucrats in order to force the desired change in policies (Giugni & Passy, 1998; Amenta et al, 2010). Because these actors have various interests and goals, influencing their calculations requires different strategies in different political and policy circumstances. Political mediation models are somewhat inconsistent across scholars, as some include public opinion as a third party mediator that in turn influences powerful political actors (Giugni & Passy, 1998).

To sort out types of political mediation, the following framework is proposed. A distinction is made between levels of mediation (direct participation in policy-making without mediators, mediation via political actors, and second-order mediation via fostering societal pressure on political mediators), political targets of influence (elected officials or bureaucracies), and means (disruption or persuasion).

First, there is direct policy-making participation, meaning that in certain political systems citizens can directly formulate, enact, or implement certain policies. Examples are plebiscites or direct democracies like Switzerland (in the case of policy enactment) and policy implementation by designated civil society organizations. Second, there is political mediation influence, meaning that elected officials or state bureaucracies must be coerced or persuaded to act on a policy. According to Burstein (1999), in democracies elected officials have three goals: reelection, increasing of their power among other actors, and promotion of their political values and visions (which can also be more a matter of appearance of ideological consistency than a genuine care about a value). Similarly, bureaucracies are interested in fulfilling their missions and increasing their organizational capacity via expansion of jurisdiction, budget, staff, etc.

The influencing of policy-making actors can be direct (political mediation) or indirect (second-order societal mediation). Thus activists can press elected officials' prospects for reelection directly, by presenting themselves as an important (swing) electoral group; or, indirectly, via winning public opinion (Amenta et al, 2005; Giugni & Passy, 1998; Soule & King, 2006) that is perceived by officials as relevant to voting preferences. Challengers can also offer increased power to political actors within the polity if they are related to allies that can enter new coalitions with the targeted policy-maker. The reelection and power recalculations can be prompted either via disruption from a direct protest (activists threatening a negative vote of their constituency) or societally-mediated protest (embarrassing the officials in the public eye); or via persuasion by direct action (showing up in high voter numbers) or societally-mediated action (sensitizing the public to an important issue).

The third goal of elected officials, promotion or consistency with political values (Amenta et al, 2005; Burstein, 1999), can be influenced directly, by presenting the movement claims in a more conventional lobbying (Andrews, 2001) – in this case the official might be considered even an ally; or indirectly, via the societal mediation of disruptive or sensitizing protest that presses the target to live up to their stated missions in the eyes of the public. A variant of this societal mediation scenario is also a strategy of broader change in social-cultural norms (McCammon et al, 2001) that can make a claim more coherent with the political actors' attitudes. Using the target's political values and visions is especially pertinent to authoritarian settings where elections and elite instability are less, if at all, meaningful, but the regime might be concerned with its ideological legitimacy (Noonan, 1995; Westby, 2002). State bureaucracies can be influenced in similar ways, by either supporting or disrupting their operations and threatening or promoting their power (Amenta et al, 2005; Piven & Cloward, 1977).



The agency of a social movement is expressed through the choices activists make with regard to the strategic goal (the desired policy solution, or prognostic framing), the organizational forms of the movement (e.g. Skocpol, 2004, Clemens, 1996) and movement democracy (Della Porta, 2009; Polletta, 2002), the ways of acquiring resources, the specific actions (or tactics) – marches, petitions, sit-ins, and the framing of the issue with regard to particular discursive opportunities. The PMP model, by focusing on phases of policy-making, introduces a meso-level between strategy and tactics: the choice of political mediation within phases of the PMP. Once a policy goal has been chosen (strategy), choices of direct vs. mediated policy influence must be made within each phase. Tactics then serve to bring about the realization of the chosen pressure mechanism.

Within PMP phases, the activities of the SM can be split roughly into three types: work on the challenger PMP, i.e. on policy-making; work on transferring that policy-making to the more or less impervious institutional PMP (breaking through), and dramaturgical work to influence the public (for societal mediation). Analysis of SM strategy should take into account where the issue stands on the institutional PMP at the start of mobilization, as it is easier for a challenger to enter an already started institutional PMP, but on the other hand, missing work on previous phases means that the policy is already shaped to certain extent by the institutions. Grievance theories and diagnostic framing might suggest that the first phase of the PMP starts from the bottom up, but this is not always the case – sometimes state experts identify and define the issue (Castro & Mouro, 2011). The choice of actions can be analyzed against the formal and informal openness of the institutional at different phases – variations in openness across stages shapes the choice of mediation. Examining SM work across stages and through different mediation paths allows for a study of SM flexibility as condition for success (Andrews, 2001;

Andrews & Edwards, 2005; Della Porta & Diani, 2009). In terms of this flexibility, the PMP model suggests that later phases are not more difficult to influence by protest (as suggested by Amenta et al, 2010 and Soule & King, 2006); instead, different phases require different type of challenger PMP work and different types of breaking-through work depending on the mediation circumstances of each phase.

To summarize, while McCammon and colleagues' model of strategic adaptation (2008) examines the stages of observation – interpretation – planning – action – observation of reaction and how activists learn from that experiential cycle, the PMP model uses the policy-making cycle to “test” for the strategic adaptation of the movement. Are activists aware of the different phases of the process, their different goals, opportunities, mechanisms of political mediation? Learning is again experiential, but the PMP model conveys even more the complexity of adaptation. Even if actions are successful at one phase, the experience may not be directly applicable to the next.

The institutional/challenger PMP distinction raises another intriguing conceptual and practical question for a social movement: How do the two processes interact at the points of interface in each phase? On whose terms are these points negotiated? Should the movement “fit” with the institutional PMP to influence it (Skocpol, 2004) and how does this fitting affect the challenger's identity and forms of organizing? Can we examine a conflict or collaboration of different institutional logics (DiMaggio, 1997), bureaucratic and informal, or rationalities (Fischer, 2000), technical and cultural in each phase? Such a nuanced approach avoids a simplistic assumption that later policy-making phases need to involve more formalization; the control or evaluation of implementation, for example, can be performed by tools like crowdsourcing or local knowledge collection.

## **Framing Processes**

Theories of meaning-making within SMs (Benford & Snow, 2000) also fit well with the challenger PMP model. Very roughly, diagnostic framing is pertinent to the phase of issue definition, prognostic framing to policy formulation, and motivational framing to break-through strategizing or actions. Beyond these parallels, framing can be studied within each phase: its main objects, meaning-making mechanisms, discourses and storylines. Frame alignment can be examined in two directions – toward political and toward social mediation. For example, the diagnostic framing of the issue can be studied within the challenger PMP and as frame alignment with the institutional and the social frames around the issue, with coherence or discrepancies among the two framing tasks examined as well.

With the concept of the challenger PMP, extrainstitutional action acquires additional meaning. A SM can present an extrainstitutional, alternative way of policy-making. This alternative in turn can provide an additional mechanism for policy influence, apart from mediation: competitive comparison. A comparison between institutional PMP and challenger PMP can put pressure on institutions, especially if the public is witness to a better (more efficient or just) alternative PMP. In this sense, a primary framing task of a challenger is to demonstrate its legitimacy to develop policies in each of the phases - legitimacy in the eyes of institutions or the public, depending on strategy. The legitimizing task seems to be easier in some phases (like issue identification by the affected) than others (research). One important way of legitimizing the challenger PMP is by showing its adherence to democratic values and practices. Similarly, a political-system critique for undemocratic practices or corruption can delegitimize the institutional PMP.

## **Political Outcomes**

Outcomes within the PMP model can at the simplest level be classified as degree of achieved access at different phases, and as substantive influencing of the institutional PMP by the challenger PMP. Degrees of achieved informal access should be juxtaposed to the initial state of exclusion at the particular phase. For example, access might be expressed in officials talking about the problem, meeting with activists, working on legislation, etc. The opposite direction of influence might be evaluated as well – to what extent the challenger PMP adopts rules, forms and practices from the institutional PMP. Substantive impact can be assessed at each stage according to its task – the adoption of the SM’s definition of the problem into the institutional PMP diagnostics, the use of citizen-generated knowledge, the degree of adoption of the challenger’s policy formulations, etc.

## **The Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria as Empirical Base of Theory Development**

### **Data Collection**

#### **Interviews.**

*Sampling.* Current and former activists were interviewed as key informants and the transcribed interviews were the main source of information about the AFM. Interviewees were sampled purposefully for a maximum variation in experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on my observations of online anti-fracking groups and recommendations from prior interviewees. Participants vary in important characteristics such as membership in local and national groups, current and former, first-time and experienced activists, engaged in leadership and rank-and-file work. As data collection unfolded I added interviewees whose perspective was recognized as unique or dissident. The participants were reached through participant referrals and the local Facebook groups of the movement. Access to participants and rapport were

facilitated by my peripheral engagement with the AFM. All invited activists agreed to participate. A total of twenty-four activists from seven local groups (cities) were interviewed from March 2012 through August 2013.

***Interview protocol.*** Semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) were planned. The interview schedule (Appendix 1) contained questions about personal experiences and insider observations regarding recruitment in the AFM, local group functioning, between-group relationships, national-level strategy and actions, perceptions of the political context and other actors. In the course of the interviews, more general questions opened these topics and the respondents' subsequent answers were probed further for elaboration or clarification.

***Interview process.*** The interviews were conducted in locations preferred by the interviewees, most often natural settings in the cities where participants joined local groups; seven interviews were conducted via internet conferencing. Interview length ranged between one and three hours, with an average length of one hundred minutes. Three activists were interviewed twice because the initial analyses suggested that some topics in their accounts were worth pursuing further. Some interviews were followed up with questions via email for clarifications. In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are not completely separated: initial coding and memo-writing as well as emergent findings can reveal needs for additional data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007).

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the author. The texts of the conversations were sent to each participant for reactions or corrections. Each participant signed an informed consent form. All research data were stored in password protected archives. Audio recordings are confidential. Pseudonyms chosen by respondents can be used for reporting and writing up of findings. Interview data collection was approved by Vanderbilt University's

Institutional Review Board.

**Movement texts, documents, and images.** Textual and visual data were collected in the course of movement actions and retrospectively, mostly from Facebook-based archives and a few from the media. Facebook was the main mobilizing and organizing platform for the AFM. It was the main space for internal communication, file exchange, data collection and banking, and decision-making. It was also a symbolically important organizing milieu as it enabled “spontaneous” coordination of loosely connected activists. I had access to the groups as a member after establishing rapport with local groups and the national organizing group.

In total, 38 public statements and positions from the AFM, 7 leaflets, 22 minutes from national and local group meetings, 200 Facebook discussions and hundreds of photos were collected. An attempt was made to collect all public statements and most of the documents produced in the movement. Facebook discussions were selected with a judgment of their relevance to the research questions and the richness of information and perspectives contained.

**Other sources.** Additional information was available from publications in local and national media and from direct observations of protest events. Media sources were useful to verify events, opinions and statements of government officials, experts and opponents of the AFM. Direct observation of protests provided contextual knowledge for the analysis of textual data, helped understanding the relationship between the movement’s meanings and practices.

### **Data Analysis**

The accumulated qualitative data were analyzed in two cycles (Saldana, 2009): the first for summarizing and labeling meanings, the second for building categories and links between them. MaxQDA, a software application for qualitative analysis, was used for coding and sorting the data. I coded the entire interview transcripts using a combination of coding methods. With

structural coding (Saldana, 2009) I coded segments pertaining to topics of inquiry stemming from my conceptual framework. During the process of coding I also maintained openness to emerging theoretical directions, performing initial (open) coding (Charmaz, 2006). This approach allowed the extraction of important ideas within and outside the topics initially formulated.

In a second stage of coding I coded within and across segments, reflected on the data and wrote analytical memos (Charmaz, 2006). I also came back to several interviewees to supplement more data to questions that emerged as important and/or unclear. Subcategories were formulated to the initial structurally coded topical segments. Open-coded segments were analyzed with the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) to create more general categories, which in turn were compared and expanded with newly-coded statements. Links between codes and categories were drawn based on the analysis and the conceptual framework.

The trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was addressed carefully given my position as participant researcher. I made efforts to ensure credibility by triangulation of sources and methods of data collection. Divergent perspectives were sought – for example, from people who left the movement or who engaged in conflict with movement leaders. The richness and diversity of perspectives present in the interviews suggests that experiences and meanings in the AFM were captured quite comprehensively. I also secured member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by soliciting comments on my interpretations from one very reflective interviewee. Finally, I believe that being a cultural insider helped me understand contextually-anchored meanings of participants.

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate new concepts and extensions of existing theory. The description of the AFM is an illustration of the use of the PMP model for social movements. A history of the AFM, including the actions of all major actors, was compiled (see Table 1).

Table 1.

*History of the Anti-fracking Movement in Bulgaria.*

Date/Period	Event
06-16-2011	The Bulgarian Council of Ministers grants a license for natural gas prospecting and exploration to a Bulgarian subsidiary of Chevron. The Minister of Economy and Energy, T. Traykov, announces the decision to the public on the next day.
07-02-2011	The City Council of Novi Pazar, a town in the geographic center of the licensed area, passes a 15-1 resolution to appeal the decision. The meeting is attended by several experts and Members of Parliament. Throughout the month of July, the first local and Facebook anti-fracking groups begin to organize.
08-02-2011	First protests against Chevron’s license in Sofia (the capital of Bulgaria) and Novi Pazar. Between thirty and fifty people participate in each place. On the next day, the opposition’s candidate in the coming presidential election announces he would initiate a referendum on fracking.
August 2011	A total of five protests are held in Sofia, all in front of the Ministry of Economy and Energy. Attendance is limited to about fifty participants. An impromptu confrontational meeting is held with the Minister of Economy and Energy Resources at his request after one of the protests. The Facebook groups expand exponentially (9000 members in the main group by August 10). First expert opinions from Bulgarian environmentalists are submitted (against fracking).



- 09-01-2011 First nation-wide protest staged in Sofia, Varna, Dobrich, Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, and other smaller towns. Around a hundred people attend the march in Sofia. A declaration is submitted to the Council of Ministers with three main demands: a moratorium on the use of the fracking technology; a rescission of the licenses granted to companies and a canceling of current open calls; passage of a permanent bill outlawing the use of fracking in Bulgaria.
- 09-08-2011 Activists attend a soccer exhibition game pitting Bulgarian politicians, led by the Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, against foreign diplomats in Bulgaria. The activists disrupt the game with banners against fracking. Visibly angry, the Premier promises the activists a personal meeting.
- 09-14-2011 The meeting is held in the Council of Ministers between activists on one side and the Prime Minister, the Minister of Economy, and the Minister of Environment on the other. Activists present the issue to the Premier, emphasizing the risks for the water, food, and health in the targeted region. The Premier orders a halt on the signing of the contract with Chevron, a full disclosure of the contracts to the activists, and detailed reports on the technology and its application in the world from the two ministers. These reports were never revealed (if prepared at all). Several days later (on September 18) activists disrupt an inauguration ceremony of a new soccer field in Dobrich led by the Premier himself. Agitated by the protest, he makes a highly publicized threat that if activists continue to “pester” him, he might sign the contract with Chevron “just to spite” them.
- September – A series of protests are staged in Bulgaria, now attended by hundreds of people.
- December One nation-wide protest is staged each month. Multiple smaller protests are

- 2011 organized by local groups.
- The local groups are organized in Facebook groups, with one open national group of over 50,000 members and one closed national organizing group. A database is created with studies and publications on fracking and its effects on human health and local communities.
- The Ministers of Economy and Environment continue to accuse activists of being ignorant about the technology and/or being paid by foreign interests. Experts and lobbyists for fracking start to organize and issue statements.
- 11-26-2011 After another nation-wide protest, on a square in Sofia, the Civic Initiative for a Ban on Exploration and Extraction of Shale Gas is founded by 81 activists. A national petition is started, per a law that allows citizens to directly propose legislation with 50,000 signatures collected within three months. The petition would collect 52,500 signatures and would be publicly filed in Parliament on February 24, 2012. It would be unlawfully neglected by the Parliament. Activists would use the signatures drive to educate citizens about the threats from fracking and invite them to an upcoming nation-wide mega-protest on January 14 2012.
- 01-13-2012 After the period of disregard to the activists' demands and actions, the Chair of the Parliament (from the ruling party) invites the protesters to a private meeting and announces that "there is a political decision" to support the ban on fracking. Meanwhile, opposition parties propose their own versions of a ban.
- 01-14-2012 The biggest protest against fracking takes place in 12 cities in Bulgaria. Estimates of participants vary between 8,000 and 14,000. In the next few days, the Economy Committee in the Parliament discusses in open meetings the terms of

the ban on fracking. After some failed attempts to insert loopholes in the text of the ban, followed by threats from activists, a strict version of the ban is approved.

01-18-2012 The moratorium on fracking is voted in Parliament, with 166 to 9 votes in favor. The contract with Chevron is rescinded.

02-05-2012 The United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, visits Bulgaria to discuss with the Bulgarian government issues of “energy security” and the political situation in the Middle East. The visit is presented in the media as a lobbying effort for shale gas. Four days later, Richard Morningstar, “Special Envoy of the United States Secretary of State for Eurasian Energy” also visits Bulgaria and conducts a series of high-profile meetings in the government. No public statements are issued. In the following months, the US Ambassador to Bulgaria will appear multiple times in the media to advocate for shale gas as a path to energy independence for Bulgaria.

February – The issue of fracking and the moratorium are raised again in the media by energy  
June 2012 experts, pro-fracking politicians, and the US ambassador. The moratorium is sharply criticized as too restrictive for all gas extraction in Bulgaria.

On April 4, a “Committee for the Collection, Analysis, and Discussion of Good Practices and Legislative Solutions with Regard to the Regulation of Activities of Exploration and Extraction of Underground Resources with Observance of Environmental Protection” is established in the Bulgarian Parliament. The Committee, made up of thirteen members of Parliament, ostensibly aims to improve the moratorium. It holds open sessions with experts and activists, but disregards the 700 pages of studies and reports submitted by the Civic Initiative.

The movement expands its demands by including a ban on coal gasification and demands for a more just regulation of natural resources extraction. Work with experts is intensified and contacts with the international movement become more frequent. Attempts are made to collaborate with Romanian anti-fracking activists as exploration licenses are granted to Chevron in Romania.

06-14-2012 The Parliament votes for the proposal of the Committee (and effectively upholds the ban) after several days of hectic negotiations. Instrumental for the acceptance of the activists' texts is the exponential rise of a new wave of environmental protests – this time for the protection of the forests in Bulgaria.

Post June 2012 The movement gradually subsides as the issue drops out of the public agenda. There are occasional events organized by lobbyists, for example conferences or visits to the United States. The government keeps an ambivalent position, but does not attempt to reopen the debate. No law is passed. Activists, more often individually than as a group, engage in institutional actions such as demanding information and signaling suspicious drilling operations. Contacts with European activists are intensified as the issue enters the European Union's agenda. Smaller-scale protests are staged to support Romanian activists against fracking. Attempts to start a regular media newsletter on fracking fail. The Facebook groups remain, but become almost inactive.

Many activists from the movement take part in the planning and founding of a broader Civic Initiative (along with other smaller protest groups) aimed at “system change” through direct civic participation. The Initiative ultimately fails due to internal contradictions and conflicts.

### **Phases of the AFM's Policy-making Process**

The history of the anti-fracking movement can be interpreted through the use of the PMP model of social movements. It is important to note in the beginning that none of the participants (in discussions or interviews) used a policy-cycle model when they described the movement or during the actual strategizing activities. However, participants who were involved in the core organizing group, especially those who thought about the strategy of the movement, were clearly aware of the phased nature of policy-making. For example, they evaluated how difficult it was to insert the issue on the policy agenda compared to other contemporary issues like the Forestry Law, where the policy had already been advanced to the policy formulation phase. In addition, many activists were acutely aware of the post-adoption phases of the issue, where the weak policy capacity of the state determined very different movement strategies.

#### **Identification and Definition of the Fracking Issue**

Fracking had to be problematized in the public debate by the movement; the challenger had to start from phase one. There was no publicity for the prior negotiations with Chevron, and no institutional process of including local citizens in a discussion of the advisability of a gas industry in the region. The Bulgarian Minister of Economy and Energy Resources framed the announcement of the contract in entirely glowing terms of energy independence from Russian gas and economic benefits. In the Bulgarian regulations at the time there was no distinction between conventional and shale gas, so the issue might not have been discovered for some time without this announcement.

These characteristics of the issue-specific political context shaped the reactions of the activists. The unknown technology was framed in catastrophic terms, most often through

metaphors such as Chernobyl, a symbol of destructive runaway technology, a harm inflicted by a foreign power, and a government cover-up; through vivid images such as burning water; and through cultural rationality (Fischer, 2000) – understanding the technology through its association with the company and its poor environmental record and with its country of origin, known among many activists for recklessness and exploitation. Within this catastrophizing discourse on risks, activists tended to frame themselves as victims, people that were “worried” – a narrative taken up by the media as well. In addition, the secrecy and exclusion of the Cabinet’s decision also presented activists with the opportunity to frame the problem as one of democracy; injustice was done because those who would be affected were not involved in the decision. Activists took the position of active citizens. The democracy-oriented frame was salient in this phase of the PMP in interactions with institutions and the media, as it gave activists legitimacy to demand inclusion in the definition of the issue.

While public definitions of the issue involved the threat to human health, the water, soils, and food in the region in an environmental health discourse (Brulle, 2000), within the AFM a more nature-oriented sensitivity was discussed: many activists were preservation environmentalists; other reported strong spiritual connections to the nature in the threatened region and a vocation to protect it for future generations. However, these identities and their corresponding nature-centered environmental discourses were purposively kept in the back region, as a form of motivation framing. Finally, another discourse that emerged early on within the movement was that of patriotism and the protection of Bulgaria from foreign “pillagers”. This framing was partly an instrumental one, to engage the discourse of independence opened by the Minister. It also reflected the strong culturally-specific connection between nature and the meaning of motherland in Bulgaria. The framing of activists as protectors of national interests

served a mobilization function but also a more strategic function to legitimize the protests and delegitimize the (energy) independence claims by the government.

The strategy at this early phase was more spontaneous than planned, but it had a few main elements. First, and most important in activists' accounts, was "the information campaign": activists spread "the truth" to "people like them" to counteract the secrecy and lies of the government. Dissemination of information happened mainly in face-to-face interactions in the streets, where human contact would persuade bystanders and counteract "the media curtain" on the issue. Government officials, including the Prime Minister, were also targeted by letters and complaints, mostly with the intention to inform about the risks from fracking. Protests were improvised (with activists most often still being strangers to each other) to press officials to listen to activists. The inclusive and pluralistic defining of the issue, with health, environmental, civic, patriotic, and even leftist explanations, was associated with a mass mobilization of first-time activists who considered themselves equal and self-driven. Common perceptions and experiences of freedom from coercive organizing structures and of solidarity sowed what would become a grassroots democracy within the movement.

The definition of the problem by the challenging movement was not accepted into the institutional PMP: the issue was never discussed on a formal forum with the government – protesters were shunned and even ridiculed by officials and the exchanges of claims were made through media channels.

### **Choice of a Priority**

The activists faced the challenge of putting the issue on the agenda of a busy Parliament that did not recognize the threat at all – i.e. to influence the choice of priorities of the state and society at the time. Some favorable contextual factors were in play, such as the upcoming

Presidential elections and the intense struggle between ruling and opposition parties in Parliament. The most often stated opportunity in my interviews though was the personality of the Prime Minister Boyko Borissov – ego-driven, publicity-conscious, and “populist” in the eyes of activists. The media was used to focusing on his personal decisions and was certain to cover personalized confrontations with him.

The strategy of the AFM was to attract attention and create embarrassment for the government through protests marches and rallies. The lucky strike for direct pressure on Borissov occurred at two personal confrontations where he could be embarrassed in front of important publics – the soccer game and the inauguration ceremony (see Table 1). At the game he was forced to notice the issue. The Premier also had to be persuaded in the severity of the threat from fracking and offered a familiar and desired role. At the meeting in the Council of Ministers, activists emphasized the threats to human health, water and food. They presented themselves as victims, and the Premier was left to play the role of the hero (activists underscored his future legacy in history). Not less important for the jump in media interest was his angry reaction in Dobrich, which reaffirmed the issue as a focus of public interest.

The movement also attempted to use an institutionalized channel for putting a priority on the policy agenda – the national petition was started, with over 50,000 signature collected in three months. By law, the Parliament had to take formal action on the petition and consider it. This never happened; instead, the main achievement of the petition was in issue definition and in its prioritization for the public: it provided activists with thousands of personal, often touching conversation with bystanders, where they could frame the issue and persuade about its urgency. These personal interactions and trust-building were the most significant disruption of the institutional approach of issue framing, where power sells or imposes a definition on the public.



Several months of protest action in many cities also shaped a movement democracy where activists experienced an alternative way of doing “real” or “true” politics, where they enacted alternative ways of organizing – informal, leaderless, and “natural.” Strong feelings of personal freedom, agency, and self-fulfillment color my interviews. These experiences and consciousness facilitated mobilization and gave legitimacy to participation.

The framing of the issue for the tasks of this phase was expansive. The threats from fracking were related to the whole region, and eventually to Bulgaria. The scale of concern was expanded symbolically by framing the area as “the Granary of Bulgaria”, thus turning the issue into a national problem. This expansion corresponded well to the self-framing of activists as citizens, meaning protectors of the common good, and patriots, meaning protectors of the national interest.

The AFM was quite successful in de facto bringing the issue to a high priority in the public debate. Activists gained direct access to a primary decision-maker (the Premier); his assignment to the two ministers to submit reports was a symbolic acceptance of the need to redefine the issue (after its original definition by the minister). Parties in the Parliament and presidential candidates also took up the issue; in Parliament, several parties started drafting bills. The importance of this phase (and why it is separated from the previous one) is demonstrated by the comparison of the AFM with the contemporary Forestry Law protests. In the latter, the issue was already being voted in Parliament; it was recognized as a priority. It was much easier and faster for activists to stage a huge protest at the exact time of the voting in order to enter the institutional PMP at the stage of policy alternatives formulation. In contrast, the anti-fracking movement had to push through all prior phases in a parallel process without getting access to policy-making.

## **Research on the Issue**

Research on fracking and its effects was an especially important activity given the complexity of a novel technology operating in the complex system of the environment (Johnson & Frickel, 2011). Research by activists started from the very beginning of the protests, but it intensified and became systematic when the problem was accepted as legitimate. After November 2011 pro-fracking experts consolidated and started their media campaign. The movement turned to a politics of counterexpertise (Fischer, 2000) after the moratorium was passed in January 2012, when under industry and American pressure the ruling party created the Parliamentary “Committee to Allow Fracking,” as the activists joked. The Committee was an embodiment of technological rationality looking for solutions to an issue (Fischer, 2000). Ostensibly it represented an opening of the institutional PMP as protesters were invited to its meetings and to submit evidence against fracking. Additional opportunities were the easy access to US experience and reports on fracking effects and, very importantly, the lack of established experts in Bulgaria on this novel technology.

The AFM’s main activity during this phase was the collecting and systemizing of information related to fracking. Using the internet and social media, participants were able, by crowdsourcing research, to collect, evaluate and systematize over 700 documents on the risks of fracking, mostly from the United States, included peer-reviewed published studies. The organization of the collection allowed for wide participation and the education of hundreds of activists in the process. In this line of work, two conferences were organized with experts with negative stances toward fracking. In addition to the research on technology, activists also investigated the activities of gas companies locally and examined the structure and bylaws of the agencies that were tasked to regulate gas extraction. In the latter investigation activists

established workable and sometimes trusting relationships with bureaucrats, using both accountability pressure and appeals to their professionalism.

As with the outcome of the national petition, the institutional PMP did not recognize the research of activists as such. The Parliament did not include their evidence in the work of the Committee despite the promises made, but featured the industry's fracking-friendly statements on the Committee's website from May 2012. Despite the demands of activists, the government also never organized a public expert forum on fracking. Yet the research phase produced other accomplishments. It brought a new focus on technology instead of Chevron or the US; such focus countered the claims of opponents that activists were driven by pro-Russian interests. The AFM leveled the ground by delegitimizing pro-fracking experts as not experts (because of the novelty of fracking) or as guns for hire. The technology-focused research allowed activists to show themselves as knowledgeable experts themselves in public debates.

Gradually, the expert work by the AFM transcended institutional expertise and technical rationality (Fischer, 2000). First, activists purposively sought an expansive definition of the issue, where not just geologists, but also chemists, ecologists, underground water specialists, physicians, and many other experts should provide perspectives on the effects of fracking. Second, they turned attention to the application of the technology and its side effects in the specific context (Fischer, 2000). They relied on local knowledge, pointing to the specific circumstances in the licensed region that prohibited a generalized assessment of risk. Ultimately, activists strived to show the divergence of expert opinions and perspectives and to reframe the experts' role from determining the solution (solving the problem) to consulting on a policy decision made democratically.

Intermediate outcomes of this phase can be summarized into several points. First, there was an impressive and workable body of knowledge accumulated within the movement and not less importantly, distributed among hundreds of activists by virtue of the process of its creation. This was a considerable democratic achievement given the exclusivity that expert debate brings to policy-making (Beck, 1992; Fischer, 2000). Second, there was a continuing process of educating the public and the politicians fed by the research. And finally, the research phase demonstrated the split between technical and political rationality in making the policy. The expert debate, with the institution's disregard of the AFM's arguments, revealed its purpose as a veil for political decision-making (Fischer, 2000).

### **Formulation of Solutions/Policy Alternatives**

Through its diverse tactics and persistent work in the prior phases, the anti-fracking movement managed to bring the issue into the institutional PMP and participate in its deliberation, thus creating a favorable political context for their cause. Representatives of the movement were invited to participate in the drafting of the moratorium text (policy formulation) and later in its amendments in the spring of 2012. Favorable aspects of the political context were also the high visibility of the issue in the press and the public sphere, and also the activity of several parliamentary parties who started proposing their own drafts of a moratorium, thus putting pressure on the ruling party to participate in the formulation of a policy.

The AFM engaged in three main activities during this phase. First, there was internal discussion of the intricacies of concrete legal texts and terms that could be included in the moratorium. Building on the phase of research, participants were capable of fostering an inclusive deliberation within the closed national group. Second, and more problematic, the movement participated in the institutional PMP, accepting some of its rules, expectations and

corrupting logic. The AFM had to elect representatives who would work directly with the Parliament and other institutions and would engage in behind-closed-doors negotiations and take urgent decisions without consultation with other activists. The splitting of a “working core” from the mass of protesters was exemplified in a case when one Member of Parliament proposed a moratorium draft on behalf of his party to activists in the fifty-thousand-member group. He was scathingly criticized by the activists there; at the same time, he was secretly contacted by the leading negotiator from the AFM to discuss his draft (which eventually became the moratorium). The institutional logic dictated less democratic, pluralist and gradual formulation of strategies and solutions, which introduced tension and conflict within the movement. The movement was strong on the previous phases in its spontaneity, authenticity, pluralism and interpersonal contacts and trust. Now, some activists, especially from groups outside Sofia, felt that the movement’s position omitted important information and input from local groups and that representatives to the institutions (entirely from the capital) overused the power they were delegated with in the negotiations.

The third important activity of the AFM was to continue protests in the streets in order to keep the issue visible and press politicians to act. The protests were organized autonomously by local groups and kept the spirit of equality, spontaneity and solidarity in the movement. Thus a division of labor between the negotiating core of activists and the mass movement emerged. The former complied with institutional logic and built on the experience of environmental groups with issue campaigns; the latter was a prefigurative grassroots alternative to politics as usual (Yates, 2014). The division reflected the split between the official, rational and expert-based formulation of solutions and the political and power brokering among parties and economic interests.

With regard to the framing of the issue at this point, the most important development was the emergence of a modified understanding of the risks. The research on the issue revealed the lack of capacity and reliability of the government to regulate and monitor the technology. To the threats from the technology per se were added the risks of its application. These conclusions were a more reflective (Beck, 1992) iteration of the initial, culturally grounded distrust to authority. The important implication for the policy solutions was in the demand for a total ban on fracking. Only with it could the safety of the environment and human health be guaranteed; regulated fracking would mean no control at all, as the administration was seen as too incompetent to monitor the industry and too closed (corrupt) to allow people to play watchdogs. At this phase a very visible new storyline emerged within the movement about the problem, its sources and solutions. The government was no longer considered a misguided actor whose eyes must be opened in order to turn him into a savior. Instead, the government was the source of the problem and activists wanted to circumvent, subvert, and supplant it.

The policy formulation phase was a success for the movement in that it achieved direct, albeit not entirely formal and recognized access to the making of the moratorium. The first text of the moratorium was almost entirely according to the demands of the movement; even a crucial mistake they made in one term made it into the text. Less optimistically, the phase was characterized by an important acceptance of an institutional, undemocratic logic of action that would create problems for the movement.

### **Choice of policy**

The success of an issue-oriented movement is usually judged by the passing of the policy demanded by the activists. In this regard the anti-fracking movement was considered highly successful by the media, politicians and experts. Two of the three demands of the AFM were

fulfilled: the technology was banned, the license to Chevron was rescinded. However, the more impactful and far-reaching demand – a new law regulating the extraction of natural resources was not even considered by the Parliament; the demand was also lost in the media coverage.

A symbolic victory at this phase was also the admittance and legitimation of political decision-making by the politicians themselves. Just before both votes – in January and June 2012, the leaders of the ruling party stated to activists that “this is a political decision.” In other words, a solution was now admitted as a resolution; despite the highly complex character of the technology per se, often used as a pretext to leave the decision to experts, the institutions admitted to the politicized nature of the issue and to a political (i.e. more inclusive) decision-making.

### **Policy Implementation and Evaluation**

Activists were well aware of the significance of these the two post-decision phases. The lack of policy implementation capacity uncovered by activists dictated their demands and strategy. Nonetheless, the two phases were quite problematic for the anti-fracking movement. The history of the movement (Table 1) shows various attempts of activists to again duplicate PMP phases that the institutions were unable to perform. Among these efforts were submissions of tips and complaints, legal demands for information, appeals of licenses in court, and visits and observations at drilling sites. However, the AFM was unable to formulate a grassroots alternative to the expert-driven and bureaucratized procedures of policy implementation and evaluation. Part of the reason was of course the inability to police and sanction. Other explanations are rooted in the inability (and aversion) of the movement to create professional organizations. Such formal structures were dismissed as contrary to the spontaneous and horizontal character of the

movement. As the immediate threat was removed, action-reaction mobilization no longer worked. Activists moved forward to other causes or back into their private lives.

### **Discussion**

The PMP model for social movements was applied to the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria in order to highlight the logic of its development, the challenges and accomplishments in its attempt to shape a new policy. Political mediation in the fracking issue was phase-specific: the movement attempted to act directly on the institutional PMP when formal rules allowed it; political figures and bureaucrats were targeted directly; and often indirect pressure was fostered by mass protests and a popular education and awareness campaign. A pattern is discernible where activists first attempted to use institutional channels for direct participation (e.g. the petition), but the unresponsiveness of the institutions turned their action to more disruptive and indirect actions. Perhaps ironically, the disruptive and mass movement tactics helped the movement foster solidarity and grassroots democracy within; the acceptance into the institutional PMP begat conflicts between two ways of policy-making: formal, representative, and non-transparent vs. spontaneous, participatory and “authentic.” Another remarkable observation is that the movement took the de facto useless tools of institutional participation and turned them into instruments for other uses, more disruptive and societally-oriented. Thus the petition was used to disseminate information and mobilize bystanders for the biggest protest on January 14. Finally, the AFM put indirect pressure on politicians by presenting an alternative process of making politics – more participatory and focused on the common good.

Strategic adaptation can also be seen from a fresh perspective within the PMP model. There was certain learning by trial and error within phases when activists attempted different tactics depending on phase-specific openings and exclusions. There was also adaptation across



phases, for example when research influenced the strategy of the movement with regard to demands, with the increased attention to technology application, or the shift to a more critical perception of the government. These processes of adaptation were not as reflective as the concept implies (McCammon et al, 2008): some adaptation decisions were a choice of the familiar, which in this case were street protests. An important limitation to strategic adaptation activities was the lack of clear structure and leadership in the AFM. The analysis of the movement also sensitizes the observer to the issue of adaptation vs. confrontation of the political context. The institutional and challenger PMPs presented different and contrary logic of operation. The movement often attempted to forcibly impose its logic on the institutions, and sometimes succeeded, as evident from the admissions of “a political decision” by members of parliament. And in a very important moment the AFM adapted pragmatically to the non-transparent process of policy formulation. This dichotomy corresponds to the pragmatism-values dilemma in movement democracy and will be discussed in paper 3.

### **Conclusion**

The case study and the findings from it have certain limitations. The perspective of the political actors and targets of the AFM is missing, which weakens the analysis of actions, reactions, intentions and influences in the PM cycle. The analysis can also be strengthened by comparisons across cases of social movements (Stake, 1995), where variations in important themes and elements of the PMP can clarify the concepts and their usefulness, and advance stronger inferences for causal relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis here, for the sake of manageability, also simplifies the movement in treating it as a single entity. Instead, it can be examined in more detail as an arena of politics itself. The diversity within the AFM is better represented in Studies 2 and 3.

The study's conclusions span several directions. The PMP model for social movements was presented through the experiences of the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria. The PMP model builds on prior policy-oriented SM research and adds several directions of analysis. The model allows for a closer, more discriminate look at established concepts such as political opportunities, movement organization, and framing processes; these can be examined across PMP phases. Social movements by definition act at least partly outside institutional channels. By introducing the PMP model, we can focus more specifically on points of access and points of exclusion of citizens from the institutional PMP. This conceptualization is consistent with a policy-specific opportunity structure – the anti-fracking movement had to act in a political environment specific to the issue at stake. In practical terms, we can focus on where exactly extra-institutional pressure on policy making is needed – these are the phases that are closed to direct and meaningful citizen participation.

We go a step further by exploring not just actions at specific phases of the institutional PMP, but also by treating the actions of the movement as a challenger PMP. The anti-fracking movement carried out within itself a full-fledged PMP – from issue identification to choice of a policy. For a challenger's PMP, a crucial issue is the starting point: where does the issue stand on the institutional PP? Is there already an on-going policy formation on the issue? In the case of the anti-fracking movement, the activists had to create a whole policy-specific PMP from scratch because of the total novelty of the problem and the lack of prior action on the level of government.

This challenger PMP, while driven by activists within the movement, also had to interact with the institutional PMP. These points of interface were contentious in that two different logics of forming policy met, in conflict or conformity. These interactions had important consequences

for the movement democracy within the AFM. However, despite the power differential, the institutional logic sometimes also submitted to the protest logic. Also, political instruments provided by the institutions turned into tools with different purposes and sometimes unexpected effects when used within the protest logic. These observations add important nuances to the established dichotomies of institutional and extra-institutional means that define social movements.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Introduce yourself and the study again. Solicit reactions or questions before starting. Inform the interviewee that the interview is expected to last up to two hours, but they can stop at any time.

Thank for the participation.

### **1. How did you join the action against fracking?**

- When? How did you learn about the problem and the movement?
- How did you get information about the problem?
- How did you decide to get involved?
- What previous experience with civic action – individual or collective – had you had? How did it matter?
- What did you do in the local group/movement? What was your role?
  - What skills and qualities of yours you think are most valuable in the action?
  - What kind of relationships do you have with other participants? How well do you know them?
  - How does your work in the group go with your professional and private life?  
How much time does it take?
  - How do you speak about the movement to your friends? How do they react?  
Have some of them joined the movement with you?
  - What did you experience while you participated in the movement? Positive and negative?
  - What drives you to go on?
- Was there any change, a development in your engagement, in your functions and role?
- Why do you think the problem with fracking occurred in Bulgaria?

- How did you see the possibility to influence the political decision?
- How did your participation affect your attitudes to politics, to democracy?
- How do you explain the paradox that Bulgarian citizens are allegedly passive, but so many people marched out to protest?

**2. (Local group) How does your group function?**

- How was your group created?
- What previous structures or relationships were built upon?
- Describe to me the activities in your local anti-fracking group.
- What are the main functions and activities on the group?
- What actions did the group take?
- What is most important for the group to work well?
- How do you plan and make decisions?
- What leadership emerged and how did it contribute to the group?
- What kind of relationships developed among participants? (Personal or work-only? Do you meet other participants outside the work against fracking?)
- What kinds of people participate in the group?
  - How do you attract new participants?
- What are your group's most important resources? Your strengths?
  - What were your most successful activities? What did you do well?
  - What was the greatest shortage that you felt?
  - What were the main difficulties and the weaker sides of your organization?  
Conflicts?
  - How did you overcome them?

- How did your group develop in time? What changed in it?
  - How did the group become stronger?
  - What was the most critical moment for your group? What was its significance?
- How did you interact with the national movement against fracking?
  - How did the national-level effort start?
  - How did you coordinate actions? How did you communicate?
  - How were responsibilities distributed between local groups and the national organization?
  - How were you connected with other local groups?
  - How did you learn from each other?

**3. (National level participant) What is the movement against fracking?**

- How did it start? How did it get organized?
  - What existing structures (organizations) or networks were built upon?
- What is the structure of the movement? What elements and functions there are in the movement? How are they performed?
  - How did you plan activities and took decisions?
  - What leaders emerged and how were they helpful?
  - What kinds of relationships developed between participants?
  - What kinds of people take part in the movement?
  - How did the movement attract new participants?
- What are the most important resources of the movement? Its strengths? How were they put to use?
  - What were your most successful activities? What did you do well?

- What were the most important qualities and skills of participants?
- What were the most important shortages you felt?
- What were the main difficulties and weaknesses of the organization? Conflicts?
- How were these difficulties and weaknesses overcome?
- How did the movement develop in time? What phases did it go through?
  - What was the most critical moment? What was its significance?
- How did the national movement relate to local community groups?
  - How were responsibilities distributed between local groups and the national organization?
  - How did you communicate and coordinate actions?
  - How did you exchange experience?

#### **4. How did the movement succeed in influencing the decision on the ban?**

- How did you see the possibility of influencing the decision of the government? What was the path by which you planned to have an effect? (Related to the question about why the problem occurred.)
  - How were the demands of the protests formulated?
  - What was your idea of success? What were the goals and how were they set?
  - What kinds of actions did you undertake and why? What forms of protest?
    - When, where and how were the protests staged?
- What factors in the larger society do you think had a bearing upon the problem and the protests?
  - What factors helped the movement?
  - What factors hindered the movement?

- What opportunities were present in the political situation? How did you use them?
- Who were the allies and the enemies of the movement? What was their influence?
- What strategies were applied given the resources and the political opportunities?
  - What strategies were used to avoid the negative factors?
- How did the interaction with public institutions and the government happen? What were their reactions?
  - What powers had the two sides (the movement and the institutions)?
  - Why do you think the government yield to the demands of the citizens? What is the explanation for the effectiveness of the protests?
  - To what extent were the goals accomplished?
  - What are the outcomes from the movement?
- What remains after this effort? What will happen next? How do you see any sustainability of civic action?

**5. How was the issue of fracking discussed and debated in public space and the media?**

- How did the public debate unfold?
- Who were the participants in the debate?
- How do you explain the position of your opponents?
- What were the main versions that explained the issue? What were the explanations about the motivations of the two sides?
- What was the role of the media?
- How did the explanations change during the campaign against fracking?

- How was the public opinion won?

**6. What do you think is unique or specific about the Bulgarian movement compared to the other movements against fracking in the world?**

**What are you interested to know about the movement? What else should I ask? And whom?**

Ask if it is OK to contact the participant for clarifying some of the answers. Thank again for the participation and provide contacts for further communication.



## CHAPTER III

### MEANING-MAKING IN THE ANTI-FRACKING MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA

## **Introduction**

The processes and outputs of meaning-making are crucial for the direction, scale, and sustainability of a movement's impact (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996). Framing is instrumental in recognizing and explaining a problem, in formulating a politically viable solution and the strategy to achieve it. Moreover, through meaning-making and signifying work activists accomplish internal and environmentally-directed tasks: attract new recruits, sustain commitment, acquire resources, generate media coverage, garner the support of bystander publics, and demobilize and constrain the options of opponents (Benford & Snow, 2000; McAdam, 1996). The purpose of this study is to explore and describe meaning-making in the AFM in Bulgaria: how activists developed understandings of a novel technology and its complex interactions with nature, of the main actors and workings of the policy conflict, and furthermore, how this knowledge helped movement mobilization, organization, and action.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Frames and Framing**

Framing analysis (Snow & Benford, 1988) is probably the most preferred approach to the study of meaning-making in social contention. Snow and Benford borrow the term "frame" from Goffman (1974) meaning "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events and objects in their world (p. 21). Snow and Benford transform this individual-level concept into collective action frames (CAFs), which are "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings" (Benford & Snow, 2000) for interpreting the world in ways that are "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198)." Again borrowing from Goffman, collective action frames are posited to create meaning in three ways: they punctuate or

amplify, i.e. make certain occurrences or features more important while leaving others “out of frame” (Snow, 2004); they attribute causality for the amplified phenomena; and they articulate links among the amplified phenomena and other occurrences, experiences, and meanings.

Collective action frames are both inputs and outputs of *framing processes* – interactions for negotiating meaning within the SM, and between the SM and adherents, opponents, targets, and the public. Snow and his colleagues (1988) make a workable typology of framing processes based on their task, borrowing from Wilson’s (1973) three functions of ideology. First, diagnostic framing is meaning-making work on problem identification and explanation. It involves focusing attention to a social occurrence, interpreting it as unjust and human-made and not natural (Gamson, 1995), identifying victims, causes and culpable agents. Second, prognostic framing involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem and the strategies for achieving it. Third, motivation framing provides a rationale for engaging and persevering in collective action aimed at solving the problem. Benford and Snow (2000) list severity, urgency, efficacy, and propriety as “vocabularies of motive” for action. Gamson (1992) elaborates on “elements of framing” – injustice, agency, and identity – that map onto this (but not only) framing process. A cognitive and affective aspect of injustice makes people aware and willing to take action. Agency – or collective efficacy and sense of power compared to opponents – is necessary for people to engage in struggle. Identity is a self-definition in an adversarial way, contrasting “We” vs. “Them.”

Collective action frames are strategically deployed by SMOs for the objectives of a movement, in a process called frame alignment (Benford and Snow, 2000). Frame alignment involves linking the meanings (frames) constructed by the movement to meanings (frames) of recipients like supporters, bystanders, the state or opponents. The success of frame alignment

depends on the resonance of the frame deployed by the movement (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Resonance (defined parsimoniously as effectiveness or mobilizing potency) depends on the credence and salience of the proffered frame. Credibility in turn is a function of frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the articulators. Relative salience depends on the frame's centrality in the lives of recipients, its experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity (cultural resonance).

Finally, one important concept in frame analysis is master frames (Snow & Benford, 1992). These are frames that are “quite broad in terms of scope, functioning as a kind of master algorithm that colors and constrains the orientations and activities of other movements (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 618).” These frames are usually conceived by successful movements in the onsets of protest cycles (Snow & Benford, 1992) and are then adopted or strategically used by other movements.

### **Framing in the AFM: A Modified Approach**

**Interpretive and strategic framing.** The classic framing analysis approach described in the previous section was modified to address some weaknesses – both general, critiqued by scholars in the past, and specific with regard to this study. First of all, the concept of a CAF obscures important qualities of meaning-making within a movement. CAFs are often tapped from movement statements or materials (Johnston, 2002) where a movement's depictions of a problem, solution, and call to action are presented to a public the movement attempts to persuade. However, an important distinction is necessary between framing within a movement and framing for the public. Benford and Snow (2000) define “discursive” and “strategic” processes of framing: the former being frame amplification and articulation within the movement, the latter being frame alignment: “deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed efforts to

deploy frames for a specific purpose (p. 624).”

This distinction between discursive and strategic meaning construction is not often implemented analytically to the full extent of its implications for practical and conceptual reasons. Very briefly, a movement’s CAF or philosophy is more easily accessible from public texts (e.g. Gerhards & Rucht, 1992); when a frame is used as a variable, scholars turn to publicly available sources or use a single item to sort organizations into predefined categories (e.g. Andrews & Edwards, 2005). On a conceptual level, Snow and Benford and their colleagues borrowed from two frameworks that were focused more on interpretation than strategy: Goffman’s concept of frame (1974) and Wilson’s of ideology (1973). From these two they coined “collective action frames,” a concept that makes two leaps away from interpretation – to the collective level and toward action (strategy). The collective level of analysis necessitates a focus on the frames that movements deploy on behalf of *all* activists and SMOs. This insertion of an action emphasis is problematic in that it directs attention toward how SMOs “inspire and legitimate activities” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614) to external recipients of meanings and *away* from meaning-making within the movement. The study of meaning construction can be conducted in its own right if strategic tasks of meaning-making are analytically separated from interpretive processes.

Such a distinction, and a focus on what I will call interpretive processes within a movement, brings two benefits. First, instead of a CAF, we can explore the diversity and interweaving of within-movement meanings, frames and ideologies (Gillan, 2008; Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Meaning-making in movements is most often an object of contention, of “frame disputes (Benford, 1993).” The solidified, logical message contained in a CAF as a public statement (e.g. Gerhards & Rucht, 1992) does not “exist” in a movement. Instead, a “network of

messages” (Franzosi, 1998) is suspended in a movement discourse with interacting and competing claims and visions. In the anti-fracking movement, as focused on a complex issue, a plurality of diverse explanations and activist identities merged into a collective policy challenge.

The second benefit from distinguishing between interpretive and strategic (or persuasive) framing is that we can discern differences (sometimes contradictions) between the two. For example, battered women developed an understanding of themselves as empowered survivors within a feminist community but had to present their cases within a victimhood frame in the courtroom to gain legitimacy (Polletta & Chen, 2012). In an enlightening study of collective resistance to incinerators, Kubal (1998) describes the differences in political claims between discussions among activists (“back region”) and those with the wider public (“front region”). Such differences between “back” and “front” are understandable when we think about the movement as strategically adapting to “discursive opportunity structures” (Koopmans & Statham, 1999): salient, even hegemonic, beliefs, values, ideologies in the larger culture or discursive field (Steinberg, 1999), often institutionalized in laws, sometimes occurring temporarily from political or economic events (Ferree, 2003; McCammon et al, 2007).

**Ideologies and identities.** Meaning-making within a movement can be studied more rigorously if we also use finer lenses when we distinguish between frames on the one hand, and ideologies and identity on the other. Ideologies are systems of meaning that contain “assertions and theories about the nature of social life with values and norms relevant to promoting or resisting social change” (Oliver & Johnston, 2000, p. 44). Compared to frames, ideologies are much more articulated, organized and coherent (Swidler, 1986); they are related to theories of society beyond the particular contested issue; and they are more stable and profound, so socialization, education and critical reflection, not alignment or “marketing” are the processes of

meaning construction and diffusion (Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Rochon, 1998). Movements can be driven by a coherent ideology, pragmatic imperatives with no ideology at all, or some middle course (Westby, 2002). Sometimes movements strategically use the dominant ideology as their frame in order to discourage repression against them (Westby, 2002) or to legitimize demands against the authoritarian state (Noonan, 1995).

Another cluster of SM meanings is collective identity. Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994) treat identity as the framing of an actor in a social contention. Identity is therefore a set of imputations about actors relevant to the movement: the protagonist, the antagonist, and the audience. Similar to ideology though, identity should be studied as a much more elaborated system of meanings within a movement. Collective identity is “the shared definition of a group that derives from members’ common interests, experiences, and solidarity (Taylor & Whittier, 1992, p. 105).” Sometimes shared attributes are “given” (Gamson, 1991), determined by structural positions or power institutions, but most of the time scholars are interested in emerging activist identities that are shaped in the challenging of political and cultural dominance. Collective identity is more fluid than ideology – it is mostly shaped in the interaction among activists and between activists and outsiders, including opponents and dominant institutions.

In the influential framework of Taylor and Whittier (1992), collective identity has three elements: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. Boundaries are the structures that establish and signify differences between the collectivity and other groups. Boundaries highlight self-affirming and positive in-group characteristics in contrast to dominant values and structures. Consciousness is a concept close to ideology: it is the interpretive frameworks emerging from the struggle of the group to assert its interests. It involves attributions of issues to systemic rather than individual failings and also a sense of agency. Negotiation involves symbols and practices

that the group uses to resist and change systems of domination and cultural codes, in protest and everyday life.

This study distinguishes between frames, ideologies, and identities and explores to what extent meanings and interpretive framing within the AFM were influenced by or developed into ideologies and identities. It also acknowledges the varying levels of elaboration of these meaning constructions, drawing from scholars who use intermediate concepts such as orientational frames (Gillan, 2008), discourses (Brulle, 1996), philosophies (Andrews & Edwards, 2005), and non-comprehensive collective identities (Saunders, 2008), i.e. groups that come together for strategic reasons but do not develop the full system of definitions and elements.

**Discourses and narratives.** Another important concept used in this study is discourse as distinctive from ideology and master frames. Master frames are higher-order meaning constructions by which a movement can take advantage of previous movements' successes (Snow & Benford, 1992), for example framing their challenge as a struggle for "rights" or signaling "feminism" to potential supporters. Steinberg (1999) opposes a treatment of frames as resources for a movement because very often a master frame is used both by opponents and activists; it is not "owned" or "controlled" by the movement.

Steinberg (1999) and other scholars prefer to use the term "discourse" to signify how a worldview is shared in the public sphere where contention occurs. Drawing on Dryzek (2005), Hajer (1995), and Steinberg (1999), a discourse is a specific ensemble of vocabularies, rules of language use, concepts and categorizations, recognized entities and agents, and key tropes (rhetorical devices such as metaphors and metonymies) that are "produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities (Hajer, 1995, p. 44)." Certain discourses, for example economic or natural-



science discourses, are established by powerholders by virtue of “institutional control and social standing” (Steinberg, 1999) as the commonsensical and legitimate ways of viewing certain social issues. A discourse is thus not a resource of a movement, but it can nonetheless challenge claims by powerholders because a discourse is multivocal (Steinberg, 1999): key words and tropes (e.g. “rights”) have multiple meanings given their contextual use.

With the multiple discourses around an issue and the multivocality of discourses, coherence is not an essential discourse feature (Hajer, 1995). How do framing processes then produce claims that serve interpretive and strategic purposes? Narratives play a crucial role in creating coherent knowledge about an issue. Narratives have been studied in framing research as forms of expressing a frame (Lakoff, 2006; Polletta, 1998). In contrast, frames are often presented as cause-effect propositions from public movement statements. Polkinghorne (1998) discusses the difference between this logico-scientific understanding and narrative comprehending. Within the former, “explanation is understood to occur when an event can be identified as an instance of an established law or pattern of relationship among categories (p. 21; Gerhards and Rucht’s study [1992] is an oft-cited example of such frames).” Narratives, on the other hand, explain events and actions by putting them in a plot, by showing their contributions to a whole; they are considered the ordinary way of knowing for lay people (Polkinghorne, 1998). Key elements of narratives are goals, motives and agents (Polkinghorne, 1998); agents have roles such as heroes, villains, victims, helpers (Lakoff, 2006; Polletta, 1998); key words and metaphors explain motives or relationships (Hajer, 1995; Polletta, 1998). Some plotlines are culturally established and easily accessible (Lakoff, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988). For Hajer (1995), story-lines are crucial for “discursive closure”: the achievement of a common understanding of a specific phenomenon by actors with diverse discourses. Story-lines combine

elements from different discourses and put the involved actors in positions acceptable by them.

**Meaning-making mechanisms.** The focus on interpretive processes and the content of movement frames requires also a finer method for studying the mechanisms of meaning. Framing analysis is focused more on resonance, or how a movement's claim relates to the knowledge of a target public. Explanation is making something unknown known by connecting it to existing knowledge (Moscovici, 1984; 2000). Within a movement, in processes of interpretation, the focus is on the relation of the new issues, events, and actors (e.g. fracking) to the existing knowledge of activists. Social representations theory (Hoijer, 2011; Wagner et al, 1999) has developed tools for examining such connections; it elaborates mechanisms of interpretation, which correspond to cultural cognition (schemata) and linguistics theory (DiMaggio, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Analogies connect an unknown object to a known one and the two are subsumed under a more general category (DiMaggio, 1997). Metaphors draw a connection between two objects based on some similarity (Hoijer, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metonymy is similar to metaphor in involving the substitution of one thing for another but with metonymy the relationship between the two things has a status of common sense (Polletta, 2006). A connection can also be oppositional, or anchored in antinomies (Hoijer, 2011): a phenomenon understood in opposition to something known (cf. oppositional identity in Gamson [1992]). Objectification (Hoijer, 2011) makes the unknown familiar by transforming it to something concrete from our experience; it is especially important for the grasping of complex and abstract issues. Powerful images fall into this category (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). Finally, Steinberg (1999) emphasizes the dialogical nature of discourse and meaning-making: activists take "cues" from texts, opponents and other discourse participants to connect novel to familiar ideas. The activists' texts in this study were examined with sensitivity to such mechanisms.

**Place and nature in framing.** Two objects within the fracking issue in Bulgaria were important for the interpretive processes within the movement and were thus included in the analysis: the threatened place (region) and nature. I have discussed the importance of notions of place and nature for local environmental grassroots activism elsewhere (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2015). Place-framing analysis is an application of framing theory from social movements, focused on “the material and symbolic dimensions of place as a basis for collective, identity-based activism (Larsen, 2008, p. 174).” Fragility and uniqueness are commonly ascribed as characteristics of the natural environment (Burley et al, 2007). These features often create a sense of local ownership, a moral obligation to protect, to act on behalf of voiceless nature (Martin, 2003; McLachlan, 2009). Then, nature is also a complex system, and even more complex is its relationship with human systems (Fischer, 2000; Johnson & Frickel, 2011). Furthermore, environmental disruption is produced by the use of complex technologies, resulting in varying levels of threat complexity (Johnson & Frickel, 2011). Consequently, experts are summoned by proponents of development to testify about the innocuousness of technological intervention. Activists are in a quandary where their claims are pitted against expert knowledge and notions of certainty (Fischer, 2000; Rootes, 2007; 2013). Interpretation of technology and its fit with nature becomes an important task of activism (McLachlan, 2009).

The study of meaning-making in environmentalism has elaborated types of environmental discourses (Brulle, 1996; 2000; see Dryzek, 2005 for an alternative typology). They contain beliefs and prescriptions about the relationship between humans and nature, the ontology of nature, and the place of nature-human relations in other systems (economic, social). Examples most relevant to this study are discourses of preservation, conservation, environmental health, and deep ecology (Brulle, 1996; 2000; Carmichael et al, 2012).

## **Research Topics and Questions**

This paper presents an exploratory study of the interpretive, back-region framing in the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria. The analytic strategy was to start from partial, object related meanings, to map a network of meanings and the mechanisms that produced them and see how they aggregated to higher-order meaning constructions such as discourses and narratives. This is a different strategy from the more frequent analysis of collective, coherent and logical frames and framing tasks in public documents. The major research questions guiding the analysis were:

What objects and agents were seen as important around the issue of fracking? How were they and their relationships interpreted? How did activists make sense of fracking and connect the new technology to their existing knowledge? How did activists interpret the link between nature and fracking? To what extent meanings and interpretive framing within the AFM were influenced by or developed into larger meaning system such as ideologies and identities? How were the partial meanings placed in discourses and narratives? What were the social-cognitive and culture-cognitive mechanisms of meaning-making? How were activists' meanings shaped by the Bulgarian cultural tool kit? How did actions and texts outside the movement influence interpretive framing? How did the threatened place (region) and nature feature in the understanding of the issue? What were the implications of interpretive meaning-making for the actions and strategy of the AFM?

## **Methods**

Qualitative methods of inquiry are especially well-suited for the exploration and description of meanings (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Meaning-making processes in social movements are usually accessed through interviews with activists and examination of movement texts (Johnston, 2002). Then qualitative analysis, supported to some point with

continuous data collection, provides the thick descriptions and comprehensive understandings of participants' individual and collective perspectives.

### **Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) with current and former activists were conducted to access and explore information about their own and collective meaning-making processes. Sampling, process and instrumentation are described in detail in Study One. Several questions inquired directly about interpretations in the AFM: about the sources of the problem, about the desired solutions, and about the public debate around fracking.

**Movement texts, documents, and images.** Textual and visual data were collected in the course of movement actions and retrospectively, mostly from Facebook-based archives and a few from the media. Facebook groups were semi-private movement spaces where current and general issues were discussed with candor and bluntness, facilitating “back region” or interpretive communication. These data are also described in Study One. They were treated as complementary to the interviews because the public statements were directed to external audiences and therefore had elements of strategic framing, while the minutes and discussions did not allow additional probing for meanings.

As part of movement data relevant to meaning-making, an additional 147 off-topic messages in activist Facebook groups were collected. Off-topic messages were quite common and accepted in the groups. Their usefulness for framing analysis comes from treating them as free association tasks similarly to the social representations studies of meanings (Devine-Wright, 2010; Wagner et al, 1996). A free association task in a survey might read “Write, as quickly as you can, any words or phrases that come to mind when you think about...” (Devine-Wright, 2010). In the case of off-topic messages these were spontaneous (not researcher-tasked),

naturalistically-prompted (not instrument-prompted) associations activists made between fracking (actors, technology, impacts) and other issues. Associations or analogies between new and unfamiliar phenomena and known concepts are a basic way of adding new to existing knowledge (DiMaggio, 1997; Hoijer, 2011). To use an example from the AFM, an off-topic posting about an upcoming protest against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) suggests that the poster considers the issues of fracking and TTIP connected, and probably generalized under a “people vs. corporations” master conflict.

Facebook off-topic messages were collected in a one-month period within the four local groups with highest activity (21.03.2012 - 21.04.2012). Off-topic messages were defined as those that were not about hydraulic fracturing or shale gas; not about Chevron or other companies that were granted licenses; not about movement actions or events. A total of 147 off-topic messages by 65 posters were collected. Off-topic messages are a complementary source because they are inferior with regard to deeper and clearer exploration of meanings.

**Other sources.** Publications in local and national media and direct observations of protest events supplied additional information. Media sources were useful to verify opinions and statements of government officials, experts and opponents of the AFM. The public debate on fracking shapes back region framing as it presents new information or counter-framing (“cues”), creates the need to interpret positions and motives in the conflict. Direct observation of protests provided contextual knowledge for the analysis of textual data, helped understanding the relationship between the movement’s meanings and practices.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed in two cycles (Saldana, 2009): the first for summarizing and labeling meanings, the second for building categories and links between them. MaxQDA, a

software application for qualitative analysis, was used for coding and sorting the data. In the first coding cycle, structural codes (Saldana, 2009) were assigned to segments pertaining to topics of inquiry stemming from my conceptual framework: understandings of main actors, the problem, the threat, the conflict, solutions, and the social order. Simultaneously, initial (open) coding (Charmaz, 2006) allowed the extraction of important ideas within and outside the topics initially formulated, for example, “spontaneity,” “truth,” and “naturalness.” One important finding was that interviewees often used oppositional meanings and definitions. I used versus coding (identifying in binary terms entities in direct conflict with each other) to capture these (Saldana, 2009; Wolcott, 2003; cf. “indigenous contrasts” in Emerson et al, 1995).

In a second stage of coding I coded within and across segments, reflected on the data and wrote analytical memos (Charmaz, 2006). Open-coded segments were analyzed with the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to create more general categories, which in turn were compared and expanded with newly-coded statements. More details on the approach to analysis and the ensuring of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are presented in Study One. The emerging categories were applied to Facebook off-topic messages to verify and enrich the meanings extracted from the interviews.

Given that the first interviews were conducted seven months, and the last ones two years after the beginning of the protests in Bulgaria, the understandings and explanations of my participants were solidified and elaborate. The interviews provided a good retrospective view at the activists’ explanatory frameworks. The contemporary processes of emergence of the meanings were partly accessible through public statements and internal Facebook discussions.

## **Findings**

Meaning-making in the movement is presented in this section following the logic

advanced in the theoretical framework: from partial, object-related meanings, to tentative links among them, to aggregations of higher-order meaning constructions. Table 1 summarizes the interpretive framing of important objects and actors. The discussion section is a synthesis of the identities, ideologies, discourses and storylines in the movement.

Table 1.

*Interpretive Framing of the Main Objects and Actors in the Anti-fracking Movement.*

Object/actor	Imputations	Key ideas	Meaning-making mechanisms	Implications
Activists	“A new generation”	Spontaneity	Oppositions	Legitimacy
	Victims	Truth	Labels	Mobilization
	Environmentalists		Links to nature	Informality
	Patriots	Common good		“Positive”
	Citizens			protests Fortifying myths
Technology	Harmful	Incongruity	Images	Protests for show
	Catastrophic	Truth	Chernobyl	of problem
	Incontrollable		metaphor	Mobilization
	Irreversible		Local knowledge	Expert debate
	Incongruent		Cultural rationality	Political pressure
			Lateral	
			Literal	
			Reflexive	
Experts	Paid off experts	Autonomy	Distrust to	Research



	No experts	Openness	authority	Politics of
	Paid experts		Lateral discourse	knowledge
	We are experts		Literal	Establish
	Citizen experts		Reflexive	controversy
Nature	Resource	Natural	Different scales	Mobilization
	Healthy environment	Incongruity (with money)	Bulgaria	Legitimacy
	Value in itself	Common good	Place experiences	Fortifying myths
	Victim, voiceless			
	Omnipotent force			
Company,	Exploitative	Incongruity	Secrecy	Mobilization
Money,	Robbing	(with life and	Company history	Inclusivity
Capitalism	Speculative, fake	nature)	USA	No coalitions
	Corrupting		Post-socialism	with business
	Source of evil			Fortifying myths
Government	Formal and personal	Absurdity	Resolution	Moratorium
	Corrupt	Political	capability	solution strategy
	Incompetent		Secrecy	Mobilization
	Traitorous		Interactions	Protests for show
	Oppressive		Interpellation	of force
			Opposition	

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## Activists

**Key ideas: spontaneity and truth.** Two words were used frequently in the stories of participants, and especially in their descriptions of actions and reasoning: spontaneity and truth. The word “spontaneity” appears in 16 of 24 interviews; more than 60 times in total and many more times is implied with similar expressions. In one of its very first self-descriptions in a leaflet, the movement is described as “a spontaneously arisen above-party citizen alliance in defense of Bulgarian nature.” The importance of spontaneity in activism narratives has a striking parallel with Polletta’s study of 1960 sit-ins in the United States (1998) where it was “the repeated word” in activists’ stories.

First, “spontaneity” meant that activists were independent, self-activated, and self-driven. In most interviews, activists recounted how they first learned about and informed themselves about fracking, then decided to do something about it, then found other people like them. This narrative was contrasted to “organized” action, associated with party or special interests involvement. The story also fit well the experiences of the many first-time activists in the movement who “were absolute strangers to each other, meaning nothing was arranged.” The association of organization with self-interest is as commonsensical as a metonymy in the Bulgarian media and public sphere, so spontaneity had both interpretive and strategic importance. Also, the notion strongly influenced the main movement strategy, information dissemination, as activists saw bystanders as only needing “the truth” to spontaneously join the protests.

Second, spontaneity also stood for reactive, passionate, emotion-driven action. The emotional reaction to the threat of fracking was important for the agency of first-time activists who had to overcome lack of experience and self-restraining notions of powerlessness. Spontaneity as emotional intensity and authenticity was also very important in how activists explained the winning of people for the cause in face-to-face conversations where “people see

that we are sincere, they cannot fail to sense it.... this energy flowing from us infected more and more people.” Finally, this intensity of reaction was seen as leverage in negotiations with the government where spontaneity meant that no bargaining was possible: no one was in control of the spontaneous crowds and nothing but the fulfilling of demands could stop the protests.

Spontaneity was also used as a descriptor for the informal, unstructured way actions happened within the movement, with lack of planning, leaders, written rules: “organization is created every day,” work is planned “today for tomorrow, even today for today.” “Strategy is always born spontaneously, never drawn and written.... All was being born on the spot.... Strategy is born on the street; it is not a backroom strategy. And that’s what’s true about it.”

Finally, “spontaneity” was used to describe the “natural” ways of organizing without an organization. “Whoever had ideas shared them with the rest and we discussed them collectively, then took decisions whether to go after them. Everything happened totally spontaneously and without controversies.” Spontaneity stands to explain how first-time activists, who are also “very different” from each other, can come together and coordinate their efforts without using symbolically discredited practices of organization. But in this function, spontaneity simultaneously explains and fails to explain action (Polletta, 1998). “Simply spontaneously” is often where argumentation of individual or group reasons and actions stops. Spontaneity explained and justified how strategy was charted, how decisions were made, how leaders emerged, and how power between Sofia and other groups was distributed. Thus the movement was really experienced as an alternative to a flawed and corrupt political system, whose ills were subsumed under the “organization” metonymy; in contrast, in the anti-fracking movement things happened not in a contrived, master-minded way, but “naturally.” For some activists, spontaneity as naturalness became a sign for a larger, “world historical force” (Polletta, 1998), that helped the

movement succeed, a fortifying myth (Voss, 1996) that no matter what the odds, the tribulations and the defeats, they would prevail in the end. “Things happen spontaneously”, one activist said; “I don’t think that any one of us, even the group as a whole, controls the processes. Things simply happen miraculously, some things happen at the right moment that help our cause, confirm our ideas and demands.”

“Truth” was another very important word in the narratives of activists. It appears approximately 80 times in interviews and also in many Facebook discussions. Truth, as in “living in truth,” was a key value in dissident movements in Eastern European socialist countries (Goldfarb, 2007) and the dissident meanings had parallels in the anti-fracking movement.

First of all, truth was seen as the main movement’s weapon in the conflict with the government. The latter’s actions, in collusion with the media, were characterized as secrecy, lies, or “populism.” Many of these non-truths concerned what Arendt (1973, cited in Goldfarb, 2007) dubbed “factual truth” – the government trying to cover up or deny facts (such as incidents from fracking or incidences of protests) and thus to distort and control the “philosophical truth,” the interpretation of facts in the public debate. Partly as a reaction to the modus operandi of this undemocratic government, truth was the movement’s banner. Practically its strategy involved mass information dissemination, “information on all levels”, “informing rather than protesting.”

More than a reactive strategy, truth was also a pivotal notion in the interpretive frame of power, protest, and society. Interviewees saw power in Bulgaria as based on deception and secrecy, on “ignorance and unawareness where you don’t know what’s happening, when someone acts upon you behind you.” The role of the movement was seen as shattering the illusion of consent and the claim of the “populist government” that “it cares for the people.” The anti-fracking activists saw themselves as instrumental in spreading the truth to others, “letting the

people see,” “educating, informing, waking the people up.” The government’s reaction to truth “coming out in the open” then is that “things are not going well for them – it becomes too clear and intelligible for the common citizen outside.” In this regard one environmentalist with experience prior to 1989 drew a direct parallel between the two undemocratic regimes – the totalitarian and the authoritarian-populist. Truth also contributed to the sense of agency and righteousness of the activists. They believed that they were making possible “the informed choice of the people” where the truth would help them “reach an insight” about how the government “takes decisions for them”; this realization would “set the people free”, restore “human dignity.” Speaking truth to people and power became a moral imperative (“Only with truth we will win”) and a fortifying myth: “truth ought to prevail.... it is human energy bound in one direction.”

**Symbolic demographics and boundaries.** The activists often described themselves as a group, ascribing and interpreting certain qualities, profiles and boundaries of participation. First of all, there was a quite common idea that the anti-fracking protests were the expression of “a new generation,” “awake and young,” “twenty to forty-something.” This new generation was “free from fears of repression,” “with new expectations, emancipated,” “free from the thirst for money, ego,” “not dug into survival,” “free traveling, informed,” “interested,” “educated,” “fresh.” Most of the generational descriptions focused not on individual biographical availability (McAdam, 1986), but on more general contextual trends of post-material and emancipatory values. Many activists talked about people “waking up,” “growing spiritually” in a society that “needs time to mature”; some activists compared the AFM to the Occupy movement. Such consciousness also contributed to a fortifying myth of an unstoppable process.

Another widely spread notion was that the movement was a collectivity of “wild individualists,” people who are “all very different from each other,” “individualities,” “persons.”

Frequently in discussions activists appealed to others to “subdue” and “win over” their “egos”; the texts create a sense of constant internal strife between “ego” and “unification.” These self-descriptions fit well with the rationalizations of a non-hierarchical, informal, leaderless and spontaneous organization. The anti-fracking movement consisted of “many ones, not one with many zeroes”; it provided space where “no one is dependent on anyone,” “everyone felt he was in charge of his actions,” “and did only what he agreed about.” The AFM seems to share a new social movement pathos (Buechler, 1995).

Boundary work, or the definition of us versus not-us, inclusion and exclusion, is also a very important meaning-making activity, and an element of identity formation (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). A very early observation from the interviews was that activists did not draw a firm line with “the people,” the general public they were trying to inform and educate. Activists saw their activities as spreading the “truth” so that other people would “spontaneously” join the movement, just like they had. In this sense, activists identified themselves with those they were persuading. This notion of a soft boundary was also supported by the experiences of multiple face-to-face contacts with people on the streets and in internet during the information campaign. Activists took pride in this authentic and egalitarian practice and contrasted it to the distorted media communication. The notion of a lack of boundary with “the people” both justified the strategy of persuasion and gave activists legitimacy in their own eyes of being “the people.”

Boundaries did exist, and revealed themselves sometimes in conflicts. There were closed organizational groups on Facebook; sometimes activists prefaced their posts with warnings not to leak the information outside. People were excluded from the movement and were retrospectively framed as ego-motivated and dominating, having a hidden political agenda, or being too non-conventional in their ideas. Such explanations obviously correspond to the self-descriptions of

activists as altruistic, apolitical, and balancing between emotion and reason (to be presented next). People who did not join the movement despite being invited (relatives, colleagues, passers-by) were characterized as apathetic, self-focused consumers, or money-driven. Finally, there were groups that were not approached at all despite some activists' suggestions to the contrary – these were mainly businesses and business associations. Activists had very strong notions of the incongruity between money and their idealistic cause.

**Protest identities.** Throughout the protests several self-descriptions rich in meaning were sustained and shared within the movement. These were not different groups with their own identities, although there were pre-existing groups in the movement like environmentalists, communists and nationalist party members; these were rather shared and enduring identities that came forth at different times depending on the need for and context of use.

**Victims.** “Victims” was the least explicitly used identity in the movement; it was a sort of baseline: the starting position of participants when they first realized (most often on their own) the looming threats. This is germane to NIMBY battles, which “all begin with the frustrated rage and fear of people who perceive themselves as victims and who see their quality of life threatened (Piller 1991, 12, cited in Fischer, 2000).” The victim identity was readily picked up by the media when they reported how people were “worried,” “fearful,” “surprised” by the prospects of fracking operations. Such notions were present in Facebook discussions, especially in the early days when the focus was on the harmful effects. An important meeting with the Prime Minister where activists “introduced him for the first time” to the technology also contained strong victimhood elements and accomplished a promise “those citizens worried by the technology to be kept informed about where things stand, notified if something happens, invited for discussions.” At this point there were voices in the groups to leave the rest to the institutions now that the

Premier knows about the risks. However, the victim identity was quickly rejected by most activists. While it provided some media attention, public sympathy and a mobilizing sense of urgency, it also played right into a media metanarrative of a self-reforming, threat-and-reassurance media-political system (Gamson, 1995), and a risk communication discourse where experts elucidate a complex technology to a fearful public to alleviate anxiety fed by ignorance (Beck, 1992; Fischer, 2000). One activist from Varna wrote in a discussion:

I did not like the media report. People are not worried and scared, they do not want to be calmed and comforted, they are AGAINST, they reject this technology. There is a big difference!!! The way they say it sounds like “We are worried, please give us reassurance that everything will be alright, calm us down and we will give you green light to drill.”

Yes – but no! I personally don’t want no comforting and reassuring from Chevron, I want Chevron OUT of Bulgaria and, to be honest, out of every other place in this world.

The main reason for this quick shift from victims to agents, from “they did not tell us” to “they did not ask us” was the utter distrust toward the government to act effectively on the demands for a fracking ban. The activists quickly drafted concrete policy demands that would prevent the use of the technology and demanded to participate in their discussion in Parliament. The political issue switched from secrecy to exclusion; the activists needed not only transparency, but legitimacy to participate in the policy-making process beyond problem definition and prioritization.

***Bulgarians.*** This was a very frequent self-description among activists, with the variations of “patriots” and, rarely, “nationalists.” There were some rank-and-file activists who were members of or voters for nationalist parties (I interviewed one); but the term was used widely to convey meanings, not membership. The use of the word had some surprising peculiarities. First,



“Bulgarians” was often used as an appellation, a derivative of the country (“people who really love Bulgaria”) without hints for characterizations or qualities germane to the ethnicity. This appellative use was common when activists rallied for unity, as in “[we have a] national cause, above-partisan, above-religious, above-ideological, above everything else, when people are unified, because they fight for Bulgaria.” Another appellative use was when “Bulgarians” signified the largest collective unit concerned with the issue, which “naturally” led to unity: “we fight for the same thing... live in the same country, breathe the same air, have the same nature – we are the same people.” The appellative use served also to instill a sense of legitimacy, because “we are the people”: “Borissov should apologize not to us but to those 7-8 million Bulgarians.”

The other use of “Bulgarians” was as a characterizing word, entailing qualities or explanations. Surprisingly, the majority of meanings here were negative or oppositional. Many times “we Bulgarians” were self-characterized as “divided,” “splinters,” “conflicting,” “nihilistic,” “gullible,” “egoistic,” “distrustful,” “cowardly,” “too patient,” “meek” and “vain.” There were far less common notions of Bulgarians as special people that could “ignite the world” or, looking back in history, “strong personalities who defied all odds.... heroes.” One quite common positive characterization was “the attachment of Bulgarians to nature, to the mountains and the protection of nature”; Bulgarians meant “children of this land.” This link was logical given the strong association of Bulgaria with nature. These expressive elements of identity co-existed with very strong oppositional ones (Gamson, 1992). “Bulgarians” was first a role of protectors against external enemies. Bulgaria as a victim of foreign powers is a strong cultural narrative, and it was replayed in the AFM. Activists talked about “the natural Bulgarian feelings against plunderers,” the need to be “a nationalist, otherwise you get smashed in the world of today”; posters and slogans used the “invader-defender” narrative (e.g. Figure 1 in Appendix 1).

The other contrast in the definition of Bulgarians was made with the government or pro-fracking experts, seen as “traitorous,” “puppets of the US,” “ready to sell their land.” And lastly, the prominence of oppositional meanings was also a reaction to libels and insinuations coming from opponents that the protests were a “foreign PR campaign,” and activists were “Russian agents.” In this framing battle both sides strove to present themselves as protectors of the national interest.

To summarize, the often-invoked “Bulgarian” identity as an appellation served to mobilize and unite, and to legitimize the protests as a majority cause. As a characterization it was a complex notion, with expressive meanings that were negative (essentialist) or positive (nature-referenced) for explaining social reality; and with strong oppositional meanings serving to mobilize and legitimize the movement.

*Nature-protectors.* One identity in the movement was strongly related to nature, and I chose this particular word because it was very often used by activists but also because a more typical term such as “environmentalists” was contested. An observer of the movement would quickly hear the statement “we are not environmentalists<sup>2</sup>, we are nature-protectors/citizens.” “Environmentalist” was a label actively and vehemently rejected by activists, especially in responses to media reporting. There were ecologists in the movement – this was the strongest pre-existing and organized group. However, most activists perceived the label as a libel. First and foremost, “ecologists” were seen as a narrow group having a narrow focus, and even a private interest. In contrast, the protection of nature as a public good (air, water, food, a national asset) was a broad and legitimating stance, and an activity the government had abdicated from. Also, ecologists were organized in non-profits, very often as professionals, and that was suspect in the media but also in the spontaneity-driven narratives of the movement. Finally, there was also a

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<sup>2</sup> To be more precise, there is no direct translation of “environmentalist” in Bulgarian. Closest in meaning is the term “ecologist”.

perceived libel that ecologists are “ecotalibans, ecoterrorists,” “hippies,” irrational protesters. In contrast, the technology discourse in the movement (see below) created a self-confidence and legitimacy that activists were more competent than institutions and even experts.

The nature-related identity was also probably the most expressive one, i.e. it existed before and could exist without issues and adversaries. Many of my interviewees were “nature-lovers”: they talked about their lifestyles in close relationships with nature, about mountaineering, hiking, path-finding, organic agriculture, clean-ups, tree-planting, etc. In my analysis of off-topic Facebook messages, the nature-related self-definitions were the only ones where expressive and oppositional posts were balanced in numbers.

**Citizens.** Movement activists often called themselves “citizens.” “Citizens” was used as a preferred identity, coming rhetorically after a “but,” such as in “not as experts, but citizens.” “Citizens” was preferred over “organizations,” “experts,” “politicians,” “parties,” and “professionals.” The word conveyed several important meanings and fine balances in how activists saw and presented themselves. First of all, a citizen is a person who goes out “to say – this is what I think; do not do this because you infringe on my interests, my life”; a citizen must “have a position; no matter right or wrong.” Citizens “defend their rights”, refuse to be “sheep-hearted,” “slaves, serfs, docile, bending heads meekly.” Activists saw the government as “not hearing their voice,” “not representing them,” and the role of citizens as “putting pressure” on the government in order to “participate in decisions” and “control what they are doing.”

The notion of “citizen” was also often used to express “apolitical” or “above political.” When analyzed closer this link revealed several important meanings. Most significantly, a citizen defends “the common good” (in contrast to politics, which is about representing private and corporate interests). Citizens “unite around causes, for the community, the garden, the park.” The

activists' cause was to "defend no other interests but Bulgaria's," their ultimate goal was to make the government "work for the common interest, the small man." In other words, the raising of one's voice was "not for their sake, but the whole society." Another meaning of apolitical was non-party: "a party group strives for power, while the citizen group strives to control power." Such claims were very common because activists wanted to dispel accusations that their protest was "political," aimed at toppling the government, with which they negotiated. "Citizens: working, child-rearing, studying" was also used to signify "amateur" in the sense that activists were not professionally engaged and invested in the issue, therefore not paid to have a position.

The notion of citizens was used to accomplish some fine balances in the public presentation and internal reasoning of activists. First, "citizens" was a desired position between "the passive" and the politician. It allowed activists to participate in policy-making without being politicians and without being represented by them. Later on, activists, in interviews or internal discussions, reflected that they were engaged in "politics per excellence.... politics about environmental protection, politics about civil rights, politics about the future, the present, for normal existence." They also qualified this as "real politics, unseen in Bulgaria in the past.... because real politics is about the good of society." Another important balance of "citizens" was that it conveyed reason and passion within the political system. Activists wanted to have voice and were aware of the links between issues; but they were also concerned not to be seen as "perpetual protesters" or "clowns" who, "not knowing what they want", raise hell on "a hotchpotch of causes." A "citizen" was both "crazy", i.e. implacable in their spontaneity, and reasonable in negotiations. Finally, the "citizen" position was one of an "informed, educated" person who did not need to rely on politicians or experts and at the same time an amateur, not a paid professional. These balances served to legitimize the participation of activists in policy-

making while delegitimizing other actors such as the government and paid experts.

### **The Technology**

The technology of fracking features prominently in the framing activities of the movement. The main demand and claim of the movement was that the technology should be banned because it is dangerous. Other statements and propositions followed from that: why it should be banned; why it is being promoted; what kind of actors oppose and support it.

This focus on technology is not surprising. The AFM is, in one aspect, an instance of an environmental protest against the actual and latent effects of uncontrolled technoindustrial development in a risk society (Beck, 1992; Fischer, 2000). Moreover, a complex technology intervening in a complex nature system produces high levels of complexity of causes and effects. In a typical risk-society quandary (Beck, 1992) the movement faced the task of understanding and explaining probabilities of potential and initially invisible harms, and of identifying few among many possible causes and culpable agents. The activists engaged in an intricate politics of knowledge (Fischer, 2000), presented in this and the next section.

The technology of fracking was framed as harmful, catastrophic in damages and scale, certain to harm, uncontrollable, and incongruous with the contexts of its application. These were the “whats” of framing. The “hows” – the activities of interpretation – can be grouped in three different technodiscourses throughout the course of the movement: lateral, literal, and reflexive. This distinction is inspired by Beck’s discussion of technology and reflexive modernity (1992).

**Lateral discourse.** The lateral discourse on fracking used ideas and experiences from other spheres (lateral links) to establish and explain the dangers of the technology. Hence it was a discourse abundant with social representations: metaphors, images, analogies, and antinomies. The name of the national Facebook group was a prime example: “We are against the Bulgarian

Chernobyl – the extraction of shale gas.” The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear power plant meltdown is still remembered with deep trauma in Bulgaria and blamed for the incidence of cancer and congenital diseases. The choice of this master metaphor for shale gas extraction frames fracking as the ultimate technogenic disaster: technology gone out of control; irreversible and often invisible harm on a mass scale; and a government attempt at a cover-up.

The potential harms from fracking were discussed at length within the movement. They included poisoned waters and soils, polluted air, elevated local levels of noise, deteriorated local infrastructure, earthquakes, diseases of animals, plants and people, higher levels of greenhouse gases, and as ultimate effects, depopulation and desertification of the region. The logo of the movement (Figure 2) became a picture of a tap with running fire instead of water (a powerful image from the 2010 documentary *Gasland* by Josh Fox). This incongruity between fracking (and its effects) and the “normal” or “natural” ways things happen became a major topic in the interpreting and presenting of fracking.

Incongruity as an attribute of fracking is a much stronger form of oppositionality or antinomy. Oppositionality is typical for environmentalism in the risk society (Beck, 1992). Contrasting of states with and without fracking was widely used in the AFM interpretations, but it is important to note not just the antinomy, but the absurd incongruity through which activists understood and conveyed the harms of fracking. Incongruity transcends discourses of the movement at different levels. With regard to technology, incongruity was underscored with regard to health, life, and place. One succinct example of incongruity was the often-used oxymoron “barbaric technology” and bynames like “Vandal technology” and “human-hating technology”. On a protest poster, an activist wrote “Here is a cocktail: water + 750 chemicals. Cheers!” A culturally-grounded example was a vivid image: a famous painting by a Bulgarian

artist where female wheat harvesters in traditional costumes donned gas masks (Figure 3).

Similarly, a loaf of bread was pictured as pierced with gas drills (Figure 4).

The fracking technology was also grasped as incongruent with regard to place. The research literature on place attachment suggests that local residents oppose new (industrial) development the stronger they are affectively attached to the place and the more incongruent the change is with their meaning of the place (Devine-Wright, 2010). Activists who resided in the threatened region shared vivid stories of how they saw fracking would destroy their everyday experience of place and place identity.

The dramatic presentation of the harms from fracking was obviously focused on its (side) effects – the main focus of resistance to technoindustrial development in the risk society (Beck, 1992). As the harmful effects were still only potential, a lateral discourse on the technology seemed an adequate cognitive and persuasive approach. Indeed, the dramatic metaphors and images were abundant in the early phases of the movement and in its public communication.

The technology's harmfulness was grasped through one other lateral mechanism – what Fischer (2000) dubs “cultural rationality”: evaluating technopolitical decisions on the basis of prior experience, peer groups, the history of actors and the social context. According to Fischer (2000), “reliance on cultural rationality is especially strong when there is reason to believe in the possibility of deception or manipulation” (p. 137) and “in a society where the level of trust is low” (p. 138) – both of these characterize the Bulgarian case. The anti-fracking activists in Bulgaria initially focused on Chevron and its poor environmental record. Furthermore, the US government and what was perceived as American way of resource extraction – reckless and exploitative – was used as evidence for harm. One of the protest posters (Figure 5) featured a grinning cowboy drilling poison in Bulgarian soil. Finally, the non-transparent legal process by

which the Bulgarian government auctioned licenses for fracking was a powerful cue within the movement and evidence for external audiences about the nefariousness of shale gas extraction. These interpretive mechanisms of cultural rationality demonstrate higher-order links between meanings – one object or actor is framed within its association with other actors and objects.

**Literal discourse.** The lateral discourse on fracking alone was not satisfactory to many activists whom I interviewed. One environmentalist distinguished between *Gasland's* contributions in explaining “the concrete technology” versus its “populist elements” (the vivid images); he had also felt uneasy about the Chernobyl metaphor which had “sounded too far removed,” but then became confident when further research revealed that used fracking water was *literally* radioactive because of elements carried back from underground layers. Many interviewees juxtaposed their initial shock from the images of fracking’s side effects to the meticulous search for “information” that the emotion prompted. Therefore, a significant amount of the interpretive and persuasive efforts of the movement were invested in a literal discourse of technology, to wit, a painstaking research, description and analysis of the technology itself – its components, stages, required equipment, and conditions of use. My interviews were frequently interspersed with impressive descriptions of the drilling process in fracking, pedantic comparisons of types of fracking, myriad details about equipment for drilling and monitoring, intricacies of legal and regulatory issues, etc. These were results of an extensive process of knowledge creation at individual, collective and then public level. The products were impressive: a collectively maintained database with “ten thousand” pages of materials on fracking, a file with over 750 documents submitted to the Bulgarian Parliament as evidence for public hearings, at least seven public education leaflets, two “informational” websites.

Activists made self-critical evaluations of their early understanding, sometimes calling it



“populist” or “disinformation”; they seem to have internalized the technocratic understanding that metaphorical or cultural knowing is inferior to technical discourse. The crowdsourcing of information was organized with rules that scientific and “journalist” articles should be filed separately and that publications without proper citations “would not be considered for addition to the folders.” There were several important reasons – strategic or interpretive – for the shift from the lateral to literal discourse on technology. The most obvious reason was dialogical (Steinberg, 1999): the opponents in the public debate, including the Minister of Energy Resources, framed the protests as “hysteria” of ignorant groups. This explanation was fully in line with a modern technocratic narrative where resistance to technoindustrial progress is a problem of information, and if it persists after expert explanations, then the public is hopelessly irrational (Beck, 1992). The activists took this “cue” from their opponents and worked to disprove it.

At an interpretive level, the lateral understanding and presentation of fracking was congruent with the activists’ strong commitment to “truth.” “The campaign of information” launched by the movement was often compared to and defined as a counter to the secrecy and distortions of opponents: companies’ secrecy of operations, government’s secrecy of contracts, political parties’ “populism”, and media’s “curtain” and “censorship” over the issue.

Also of importance, after three months of protests the contention entered a new phase – the activists were accepted by the Prime Minister and he announced that more information on the risks of fracking should be collected before proceeding with the Chevron contract. Three opposition parties proposed variants of restrictive regulation on fracking. And almost right after the protests won a moratorium in January 2012, a parliamentary committee to investigate possibilities for safe gas extraction was created, perceived by activists as “the committee to allow fracking.” In other words, the issue was already firmly past the phase of prioritizing; it was time

for research and the formulation of concrete solutions, including specific regulatory texts. The movement took full part in these processes, not entrusting the work to experts or politicians. The focus on the technology and the very process that creates harms was unavoidable.

Furthermore, as one activist put it, “in our activity and search for the core problem /.../ we got to the technology – it is the problem.” With research and reflection activists realized that fracking can be used for extraction of other resources than shale gas, which, although a sticking term in the beginning, was not workable when it came to prevention of the harms from the technical process. Similarly, the activists realized that Chevron, although an easier enemy with its environmental record, should not be the main target because it did not matter who used the technology. Lastly in this line of explanation, the movement also underscored a focus on technology vs. focus on government. Time and again, in interviews and public communication, in heated Facebook discussions, activists stated that they were against the technology and not against the government. Again, there were both interpretive and strategic grounds for this framing. The activists had engaged directly with the Cabinet and demanded the rescinding of the license and a general ban. Strategically, activists had to provide an opportunity for their main target of influence to roll back a decision while saving face. On an interpretive level, the activists were highly skeptical of the Bulgarian political system and toppling a particular political party from power was not seen as a solution. Lastly, in the dialogical and cultural context, the movement wanted to disprove the knee-jerk blames that they were being used (or even directed) by political opponents of the government, and the focus on technology provided this opportunity.

While the lateral discourse helped imagine and grasp the severity of fracking’s effects on water, soils, air, food, and people, the literal discourse served to elaborate what attributes of the technology would bring about the effects and how. A catastrophizing framing (Kubal, 1998),

common to environmental protests in “a catastrophic society” (Beck, 1992) of technoindustrial development generating enormous risks, persuades audiences and mobilizes activists.

The first catastrophizing characteristic of fracking was that it would create expansive risks: the damages would not be contained and local, but would instead affect larger and larger groups and areas. Early on activists realized that the licensed region covers a deep underground aquifer, Malm Valange, stretching under the whole Dobrogea area, including its Romanian part. Fracking would poison the water in this entire “underground lake” and damage the whole region beyond the national border. Another discovery was that the Chevron contract was just the first of more than twenty covering one-third of the Bulgarian territory. This “full picture and dreadful information” expanded dramatically the scope of fracking risks and effects, from local to regional to national and even transnational level. Finally, the expansive understanding of risks included an interpretation of the symbolic meaning of place (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2013). The threatened region has a great significance in Bulgarian history as a grain producer – “the Granary of Bulgaria” – that feeds the nation and contributes to Bulgaria’s fame for agriculture. “This is our most precious – our granary, Dobrogea.” One of the prominent accusations was “You are selling Golden Dobrogea”; one of the public slogans: “If you eat bread, this concerns you.” Using strong cultural codes, activists framed the threatened region as a national treasure, and thus made the issue a national one.

Other important attributes ascribed by activists were that the harms were irreversible, inevitable, and often invisible. Irreversibility was substantiated by the claim that the underground aquifer cannot be cleaned when poisonous fluids from fracking are released. Another argument was that the radioactive produced water cannot be purified in Bulgarian water-cleaning plants. One of the ways activists made sense of the irreversibility and also showed it in protests was by

bringing along their children as victims and actors. Inevitability of harms was an important attribute because technocratic discourse is about probabilities and levels of acceptance (Beck, 1992). Activists claimed that pollution was not a matter of if, but when, because given the extensive drilling and big number of rigs involved in fracking, it was inevitable that a drill would leak and poison the aquifer. Finally, the radioactivity of fracking water – staying and migrating underground or flowing back to be put in reservoirs – was a stern concern for activists. The history of the Chernobyl disaster when children were exposed to invisible risks was intolerable.

The literal discourse on technology had its limitations as a tool for protesters, because if the focus of debate is entirely on the technology per se, a moment must come when experts can substantiate a safe use of an improved technology in some ideal conditions, while explaining away failures with idiosyncrasies of local application (Beck, 1992). Such denouement is inevitable within technoscientific reasoning that emphasizes abstract, universally applicable knowledge and leaves side effects as – side. It also requires “componential thinking” (Fischer, 2000) where technological processes are a narrow focus leaving out contexts of application.

**Reflexive discourse.** Beck calls for a “reflexive modernity” discourse (1992) to supplant the previous one. In a reflexive discourse on technology, side effects are part of the technology and should be debated and considered in advance of application. This in turn means that local application context and local knowledge are a key component of the reflexive technodebate. In addition, holistic and multidisciplinary knowledge instead of specialization is needed to asses all possible effects. Causality is assumed as diffused and evaluated not only with regard to technology, but to social, political, and other contextual agents and factors.

In the Bulgarian anti-fracking movement there were indeed activists who, within the lateral discourse, admitted in discussions or interviews that “the goal is to not allow (fracking)

until some safe technology is invented.” The course of the lateral debate and the research on fracking though made it clear to activists that a focus on technology was insufficient to grasp and prevent the risks from fracking. Consider the following revelation from an activist:

What we found was – we [Bulgaria] did not have absolutely no legal or regulatory base that puts some limits, that monitors or does whatever anything in non-conventional fuels, or any resource extraction field, absolutely none. There were some decrees from 1956, untouched, some safety regulations.... And then you discover that you have the same three people in the [Ministry of Environment] who receive documents, issue licenses, go out to monitor in the field. They don't have nothing, no equipment, no tools, no any other means to measure anything. They go to the site and rely entirely on the data supplied by the exploiting company, their logs....The more you get into the details, the more knowledge you acquire, the bigger and bigger gaps you establish in control, in the legal base, in technical execution. The gaps are so big, so staggering, that the human mind refuses to accept them, such madness, you know, a normal person cannot accept (*laughs*).

Thus, in what I call a reflexive discourse on technology, activists moved the focus from technology and process to the context of its application. The shift was a result of research but also of extensive use of local knowledge (Fischer, 2000). Activists from the threatened region talked with farmers and rural residents; took photos of existing oil rigs; attempted to meet the managers of rig operators; monitored transport vehicles. As a result, important contextual factors were brought into the discourse. Local knowledge and research on the regulatory environment made clear that political, regulatory, social and economic factors made the “safe” use of fracking impossible in Bulgaria. “Uncontrollable” as a key attribute of the technology changed its meaning from inherent (as in “undeveloped technology”) to contextual (impossible to control

application), from the lateral to the reflexive discourse.

## **Experts**

The experts participating in the fracking conflict were prominent actors in the storylines of the AFM. There were different discourses on experts and expertise in the course of the movement, roughly comparable to the lateral, literal, and reflexive discourses on technology. The lateral discourse was characterized with understanding of experts based on the perceived associations they had with other important actors. Above all, there was a widespread distrust toward experts, quite typical for contemporary environmental conflict (Fischer, 2000). Experts were seen as “lying and spinning,” “a means to calm down people with their faith in experts, [because] experts know their job.” They were also distrusted because professional expertise was perceived as institutionalized, even in the non-profit sector, while activists valued spontaneous, egalitarian, and bottom-up participation. As one interviewed environmental expert recounted, authority from expertise even *within* the movement was rejected as imposed in contrast to the “natural” emergence of leaders through participation in action.

The opponent experts were almost unanimously considered corrupt, “paid for” and bought off; some activists called them “lobbyists rather than specialists.” Patriotic- and nationalist-minded activists also despised them as “traitors” and “Janissaries” (a very strong word in Bulgaria). These explanations were also used in the public exchanges to paint pro-fracking experts as untrustworthy. While such accusations against experts are common in technological debates (Beck, 1992), the claims of the Bulgarian activists were also buttressed when three of the pro-fracking experts were revealed as former socialist secret service collaborators (i.e. unprincipled guns for hire), and the leading pro-fracking geologist as a former consultant for Texaco, now part of Chevron. In addition, for both movement- and counter-movement experts,

activists rejected an authoritative role where experts “tell what should be done.” On the contrary, in the beginning of the protests there were many voices who called for local and national referenda in order to bypass expert decision-making.

A literal discourse on experts and expertise concurred with the focus on technology. When activists started researching the issue they quickly realized that “there are no experts” on fracking in Bulgaria: “no specialists, no geologists, no scientists, no engineers who are comprehensively familiar with the technology and who can give an expert opinion.” This is literally correct: in issues arising from novel technological developments laypeople, activists and experts must educate themselves and collectively craft decisions (Callon, 2005 [cited in Eyal, 2010]). The anti-fracking activists underscored the lack of expertise and attributed it mostly to the peripheral status of Bulgarian science. Attempts were made to contact American geologists and engineers to up the ante in the literal debate. Activists also earnestly embarked on becoming experts themselves. Their self-confidence was boosted by exchanges with governmental institutions where activists educated and influenced officials. One of the professional environmentalists I interviewed noted that activists “started believing themselves too much.”

In the very first months of the protests the activists engaged also in a reflexive discourse on experts and expertise. Anti-fracking activists called for expanding of the expertise in the debate on fracking – not just geologists and petroleum engineers, but also soil experts, seismologists, chemists, physicians, hydrologists, environmentalists, even economists. Narrow specialists’ opinions “must be considered last, because they are in a conflict of interests,” as one internal discussion concluded; not because they were “paid off” or “not experts”, but because they have most to gain professionally from fracking; because of their structural position in the development and implementation of the risk-producing technology (Beck, 1992).

The expansion of the debate on fracking allowed the activists to engage in the game of counterexpertise (Fischer, 2000): on a complex and multifaceted issue citizens (lobbyists, governments) can pick experts whose position is concurrent with their own, thus becoming more dependent on science but less dependent on particular studies (Fischer, 2000). Activists demanded persistently to see “our experts” on parliamentary committees, meetings and debates. An expert pool was created and expanded in the course of the movement; there was an unsuccessful attempt to create a permanent expert council to the movement. A different role was assigned to experts in this expanded discourse. Rather than shields for political decisions or deciders for the public, experts were relegated the function of consulting, “supplying information” and educating of citizens in the public debate. In this Deweyan prescriptive view (1927, cited in Fischer [2000]), activists demanded that fracking “should not start until information is available and people can make the decision.” Activists saw their own role as experts-informers for the public and policy-makers, deemed key to their success the ability “to explain processes in a lay manner, not specialist-like” and contrasted it to “the heavy, outlandish terminology” of professional experts. Anti-fracking activists went a step further and attempted to be facilitators of “the public debate” on fracking. While lamenting the unwillingness of the government and media to set up “a true” public debate, activists organized and put online at least two public education (“official”) conferences, and three public talks by experts.

A very interesting understanding of trustworthiness and validity of expert opinion can be discerned among activists on the basis of their gradually more receptive attitude to expert activists. In one story of an anti-fracking environmentalist, in the beginning the activists expected him to participate “as a citizen,” as equal and not an expert. Then, through intensive interpersonal communication and “personal engagement,” “trust and respect” supplanted the blanket distrust of



authority. A new nuanced understanding of expert autonomy within the movement became crucial to judging whether an expert was trustworthy or not. The distinction was along the dichotomy professional-citizen, or paid-spontaneous expert. Professional experts are not autonomous; they only speak when they are paid to (even if not paid off), and only on the narrow topic they are paid to speak about. In contrast, “experts with civic engagement” speak spontaneously when they see a problem; they speak on the problem as they see it, not just on a piece of it that was paid for. Thus their opinion is autonomous and trustworthy. Furthermore, the commitment of paid experts to the payer also results in expert opinions being consumed by companies or the government, and not “reaching society,” “connecting to the people.” Borrowing from Eyal (2006) and Medvetz’s (2012) field of expertise framework, citizen-first experts were seen as autonomous and open to the public, to wit public intellectuals, while professional-first experts were dependent and publicly disengaged, “technicians” (Eyal, 2006).

Finally, one important shift with the reflexive debate was the change of the purpose of expertise for the movement. Here it was not to prove a definitive harm but “to establish controversy, dissension, different interpretations” about the effects of fracking. Activists realized that no matter how deep they delve in the technical details of fracking, they cannot write all missing regulation policies from the laws and terms to the manuals of rig operators. Therefore they wanted to establish controversy, reject the default approval of the new development, and then call for the principle of precaution to stop fracking. To summarize, by engaging with expertise and managing the positions of experts around the movement, anti-fracking activists were able to gain legitimacy for their own participation in an otherwise closed and elitist process (Fischer, 2000), reaffirm a “cognitive sovereignty” (Beck, 1992) and define validity of harms and victims. In this effort the participants applied three different discourses, relegating changing roles

to experts – from rejection to authority to consultancy and education. Similarly, the goals of expertise application changed from proof to show of controversy.

## **Nature**

Nature was an important topic in the framing of fracking, as all harms from the technology were mediated by its effects on nature. Nature was the direct “victim” in the story. Nature was an object but sometimes also an actor. An environmental discourses framework (Brulle, 1996; 2000) is useful in depicting how activists understood nature, their relationship with it, and the consequences of fracking. First, in a resource (or, conservation in Brulle’s terms) discourse, nature was perceived as a valuable resource for human activity that should not be destroyed or over-exploited. Activists talked about fracking operations as competing with Bulgarians’ “material desires for the use of the land.” Fracking was “hindering agriculture and tourism, and everything nature-related”; activists “wanted clean nature, so [they] could use it as it is, to present it [to tourists] as it is.” Such use should be “sustainable” and “planned,” whereas fracking was “quick profit, and after us, the deluge.”

The confidence that fracking was a wrong use of the natural resources was grounded in the common conviction that clean nature was “the most important asset Bulgaria has,” “the only one left”; that “the future of Bulgaria is in agriculture and sustainable tourism because these are the endowments of the climate, nature, all conditions.” These natural gifts and endowments were seen as “basic values that Bulgaria should protect.” From here followed an important argument about independence as a counter to the pro-fracking claim that the discovery of gas would secure energy independence for the country: “Everything else can be fixed later. Important are food, water, independence. Because you can do with or without energy independence – many countries are just fine without it; but if you are water- and food-dependent – there is no fixing that.”

The second prominent discourse within the movement was environmental health (Brulle, 2000), based on seeing nature as the environment for human life and health, with an emphasis on clean air, water, and food. As one activist put it, “when it comes to the existence of the people and to resources like bread and . . . not having [clean] water to drink, this was perceived as genocide against people, not just an imaginary harm to nature.” The focus of this discourse is on human health as a function of the natural environment, with humans as part of and dependent on nature. This theme was already elaborated in the discussion of the effects of the technology.

There were two other discernible discourses within the movement that were based on the valuing of nature “as it is”, its pristineness and primacy over direct human benefit. In what can be categorized as preservation discourse (Brulle, 2000), activists talked about their lifestyle “in accordance with” and “close to” nature, “their home”, “out of the city.” My analysis suggests that this environmental philosophy is closely related to the nature-protector activist identity. In this discourse nature was a non-conditional value and activists put their “love of nature” in the center of their concern and their lives. Nature was a source of joy, recreation, healing and inspiration for harmonious life. Finally, the deep connection to nature for a few activists had a more radical, even mystical aspect which suggests a discourse of deep ecology (Brulle, 2000). Within this discourse, humans are not privileged beings; nature is a being itself. Some activists talked about humans and animals being “one family”; there was also a theme about the “assault on Mother Earth” who “calls us to defend her.” One leading activist was expelled because he publicly stated that the Earth is a living organism. This event was an example of the firm line between internal and external framing with regard to the significance of nature. In the public debate activists stressed a resource- and health-oriented discourse on nature; privately and among themselves more radical themes were shared as well. In Facebook off-topic postings nature as a value in

itself was about twice more frequent than nature as a means for human well-being. Such observations concur with Kubal's analysis of incinerator protests (1998).

From these discourses and from the discourses of technology we can also discern different levels or scales at which nature was defined: physical place, local environment, region, nature in general and Bulgaria. These scales, as was shown in the technology discussion, stage different levels of fracking's (harmful) effects, and different levels of incongruity of these effects with the "natural" or "given" state of things. Thus, fracking operations were incongruent with people's sense of place; fracking chemicals and residues were incongruent with life in the local environment. To add to these levels, within the resource discourse activists described the incongruity of fracking and gas extraction with the regional and national economies and livelihood. Fracking was "suitable for a desert like Texas"; it would turn Dobrogea, "the Granary of Bulgaria" into a "moon valley," "industrial site"; it was an "abruptly imposed model from outside, a model that has nothing to do with the endowments of the country."

Ultimately, the scaling up and the valuing of nature in itself bridges environmental frames to patriotic and civic discourses. In a patriotic framing, "here everything starts with nature," it is "our trump card," "the most important asset Bulgaria has," "the only one left," therefore "it is national treasury and we must defend it<sup>3</sup>"; fracking "surpassed all similar attempts to loot and destroy our country." Moreover, nature is considered a defining feature of Bulgaria, with reverence of nature having deep cultural roots (Krastanova, 2012). Activists attributed to this reverence part of their success. Finally, the defense of nature and Bulgaria's natural resources were also widely perceived within the movement as a defense of the common good against private interests and thus nature connected to the activists' citizen identity.

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<sup>3</sup> And indeed, Bulgaria is the European country with the highest percentage of its territory in EU's Natura 2000 protected areas.

Throughout these environmental discourses, and especially in the preservation and deep ecology ones, nature often loomed as an actor, not just an object in the story. One quite common role was that of a victim who must be saved by the heroes-activists (Lakoff, 2006). Some activists felt a responsibility to fight for “the most defenseless” and to hear “the call of the land to protect her.” Such understandings and claims about nature are important for activists’ motivation and legitimacy because they support that a movement “expresses the common good and the vote of those who themselves have neither vote nor voice (Beck, 1992, p. 31; a poster on Figure 6 exemplified this idea).” Apart from the role of victim for some activists nature was also an elemental force that retaliated against human atrocity. Such understanding, although uncommon, functioned as a fortifying myth.

### **The Company, Money, Capitalism**

While the technology was widely perceived as the main source of harm and targeted publicly as the main problem, “the villain” (Lakoff, 2006) in the story was the company, the oil and gas corporation. The company was the actor and its driving force – money – was seen as the source of the problem. The understanding of the villain in the movement evolved in an expansive way, from a specific company to corporations more generally and to higher-order forces like money and capitalism in the end.

When the Bulgarian government first announced that it will sign a contract with Chevron, that company became one of the main objects of interpretive and strategic framing of the environmental resistance. The company was targeted as the main actor, as the agent that must be pushed away. Chevron’s infamous history was evidence for the damages to be inflicted on Bulgaria. At the early stages the history of Chevron was a lateral way of interpreting the unknown technology and also an argument against the government’s claims that it had attracted

“a world company,” “a big investor.” Chevron was also very early associated with the United States as an actor that had its own interests in the issue. Such association was only affirmed when high profile US diplomats, including the then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, promoted fracking in Bulgaria as a means for “energy independence.” This association helped frame fracking as a case of stereotypical American “cowboy” recklessness. Additionally, it bridged to more overarching nationalist frames. For many activists fracking was another way of promoting American domination: “punch their land, poison their water, make them dependent.”

The focus of framing turned quite early from Chevron to all gas companies operating in Bulgaria. There were two other companies that were already drilling to explore for gas and several at the verge of signing contracts with the government. This information was uncovered as activists researched the issue: while Chevron was a cue from the government to which the movement reacted, the generalization was a result of their own actions. However, another reason for the switch was the counterframing of fracking supporters who accused activists of being Russian puppets. At this time the discourse also shifted to the technology as the main problem, regardless of the company using it. The change also modified the nationalistic framing of the issue – the US was generalized to “foreign companies,” robbing and bleeding Bulgaria of its resources. In this narrative, Bulgaria was a victim of foreign capital and a traitorous government; poverty and misery in Bulgaria were due to the drain of its resources. This reasoning eventually led many activists to organize against the resource concession laws in Bulgaria.

Yet there was another level of generalization, or a larger system seen in the discussions and interviews, concentrated in the fuzzy notion of “money.” On the one hand, “money” was a higher level of organization of the corporate forces; on the other, it was the common denominator for all companies: their motive for action. First, money was a less ideological (thus less

elaborated) shorthand for the forces and logic of capitalism in the world, “some cartels, monopolies, oligarchs and all that scum.” Activists took the fracking issue as an example of stocks speculation and manipulation. Some activists’ research had unveiled that companies that were to drill in Bulgaria had nothing but a central office and promises to would-be investors. The banks and stock exchanges were also put into this picture of “a bubble and dupery” for ordinary people. “Money” was thus a shorthand for speculative capital seeking profits in the world, a system where “not who does the work [wins], but those who spin money in ways the others can’t fathom.” This understanding also provided a fortifying myth: “This is a pyramid, therefore it will crumble sooner or later.” Catastrophic news about the world financial system was indeed very common in off-topic Facebook communication. A more structured anti-capitalist discourse (let alone ideology) did not materialize in the movement. The Communist group, booted early from the movement, was considered by the environmentalists as having a narrow perspective: “They fight against this only because they are against corporations and big capital; they do not take the comprehensive view, the pollution of water, etc.” The shunning of an anti-capitalist ideology is most likely due also to its polarizing potential in a post-Communist country. The notion of “money” as an actor allowed for an inclusive systemic villain for different activist groups.

The other way “money” functioned as an explanatory concept was in the sense of a powerful motivator for actors in the conflict. For many activists it sufficed to state that “it’s about money,” “it’s the bottom-line” to define the driving force of the problem. “Money” was perceived as the natural motive for companies; it was though quite often disapprovingly ascribed to other actors. Within this discourse, activists condemned the Bulgarian government as corrupt and governments in the world generally as “working for those who can pay.” Activists also saw the media and the opponent experts as “bought off” and interpreted the unsupportive behavior of

other actors (e.g. big landowners) as a consequence of money for silence. And ultimately, a lot of interviewees lamented a general penchant among “people” to “seek financial gain, to satisfy mercantile or consumer needs,” “thirst for money”, in an “artificial value system.” Such perspective provided another overarching explanation focused on the individual – “thirst for money and the ego are the things that kill.” The understanding of money as a driving force produced one more crucial incongruity in the movement’s framing – that between money and nature (and hence life). Activists were both angry and sneering when they described the idea of sacrificing nature for profit. As one activist exclaimed, “You can’t be such an idiot to say, well, we will destroy Bulgaria’s nature but we will make some money.... Where are you going to live then, our children, we – where are we going to live?” Another one said, “You simply realize that these are just papers with no value. The real value is the natural resource – the pure water, air, soils – they sustain life on Earth.... A sane person, not brainwashed by this Western commercialism, sees these things.” (Cf. Figure 7). Such juxtapositions of the two values served to mobilize participants as righteous and “normal” and reject the claims of opponents as absurd.

The incongruity of money with nature had another effect in the almost unanimous aversion of activists to potential collaboration with companies from agriculture or tourism that had a lot to lose from fracking. Activists rejected the notion that the cause had any gain motive. Additionally, a full-fledged economic discourse where gains and losses from fracking could be evaluated and weighed was shunned and purposely rejected. The economic claims of fracking supporters were countered when brought up, but such debates usually ended with statements like “the health and life of Bulgarian citizens and our environment have no price; no matter what contingent gains we compared them with, we know where the balance will tip.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Movement press-conference from 09.29.2011, Sofia.



## **The Government**

The government was the main target of the anti-fracking movement's persuasive actions. If the technology was the problem and the company was the "villain", the government was seen and targeted as the actor to resolve the issue. This most important role begat complex and changing interpretations and strategic actions about the government's motives, capabilities, and ways of action. Activists were able to discriminate among the many elements and persons, their motives and responsibilities, within the governmental institutions. This "resolution capability" came as a result of the extensive research and interaction with the institutions that had some connection with the issue. The activists learned to navigate among political parties, parliamentary committees, ministers, ministry and agency experts, local authorities and the police. The protesters learned to appreciate and work cooperatively with "the level of person in institution," "people who are competent, do their jobs well, want to help." Activists also developed nuanced theories about the motivations of different governmental units or actors, their sometimes conflicting interests, their dependencies. This ability to discriminate was crucial for the success of the movement which needed to simultaneously confront and work with the government. In contrast, in the Facebook off-topic postings, the highest number of attributions for the government were very general, negative and under a mobilizing theme of "there is no government like this," expressing the absurdity of government actions.

Another complex understanding of the government was that it was both a very formal and a highly personalized force. The interviews and discussions abound with descriptions of procedures and legalistic details of "a heavy state machine that once set in motion, moves and mauls." The strategy of the movement with its emphasis on mass protests and demand for moratorium was based on the understanding of the difficulties of introducing new laws in the

policy-making process. The activists also attempted to fully use the formal rules of institutional functioning, to make institutions live up to their own rulebooks (Alinsky, 1972) when seeking information, demanding the use of administrative powers and control, going through official channels of citizen participation in policy-making, and the use of policy-related expertise. However, activists also realized that these formal routines were often a way of “throwing dust in our eyes,” of offering formal solutions that keep the problem alive in reality.

A matching plane of action was that of personalized conflict with three representatives of the government: the Minister of Economy and Energy, the Minister of the Environment, and Prime Minister Boyko Borissov. The two ministers were seen as story “villains” because of their personal responsibility for promoting fracking and “misleading” the Prime Minister. They were targeted by many slogans and posters of the movement. This focus was partly drawn by interpellation (Althusser, 1970): the two ministers took active and provocative stances, calling activists “hysterical,” tools of “a foreign PR campaign” and “a group of five people.” Borissov, on the other hand, was a key target in the movement’s strategy, because of the widely held belief that in Bulgaria “whatever the Premier says, happens.” Activists described the personal attributes and traits of Borissov as crucial for the success of their campaign: a person with a big ego who “cannot stand public criticism,” an “impressionable” “populist”, “a vacillating ruler” who “bends under pressure”<sup>5</sup>. Activists attracted the attention of the Premier by disrupting a football game where he “played” with foreign journalists. In an ensuing personal meeting with him and the two ministers, they extracted a promise from him to examine the issue from all sides because “he did not want to remain in history as the poisoner of Dobrogea.” This and other highly visual, dramatic and personalized confrontations drew media attention (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007) and

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<sup>5</sup> Very similar judgments were made by the US Ambassador to Bulgaria John Beyrle (2005-2008) in secret diplomatic cables published by Wikileaks.

started a cycle of actions and counteractions that eventually served the movement in making the Prime Minister commit personally to the issue. The public story where Borissov was misled by the two ministers was convenient for both sides as it afforded the ability to conflict without obviating negotiation. As a general tendency, an initial partly naïve benefit of the doubt to the government changed with deepening distrust as the movement got to know its opponents.

The widely held perceptions about the government among activists were that it was corrupt, incompetent, or traitorous. Such attributes roughly fit the money, technological, and nationalistic discourses, respectively. As was shown in the discussion of money as a driving force, the actions of institutions and elected officials were often explained by corruption and financial interest. Activists resented the politicians and officials who were “for sale” and who served “the highest bidder,” while some of them also directly promoted their own business interests. The government was also revealed in the course of research and interactions with agencies and policy makers to be inadequate and incompetent, sometimes “totally amateurish,” “not thinking” and “semi-literate.” Activists, with certain pride, recalled key episodes where they taught government agencies and politicians about European Union directives and fracking terms and processes. In the later stages of the campaign activists were certain that the institutions were simply and utterly unable to regulate and control a technoindustrial process even if they wanted to. Finally, for some activists the harshest verdict on the government was that it was “traitorous,” dependent and beholden by foreign interests. This narrative was fed, on the one hand, by the open promotion of fracking by US officials, but also by a deep cultural narrative about the traitors, “Janissaries” among us who sell us to an external enemy (the Ottoman Empire, Germany, Russia, etc.) The two levers that made the government move according to activists were money and fear for their power and control. “We cannot buy them, therefore we can only scare them,” as one

activist quipped. “A government will not topple itself for money; there is a boundary, a threshold beyond which their calculation of risk fails.” The protest strategy was thus to create “excess debate, excess tension” for the government where their “instinct for survival” would kick in. The reaction of the government to the protests was seen as constrained by that same logic of fear and money – and thus futile. A few activists recounted instances when they or other people were threatened by authorities (via surveillance, employer pressure, tax audits). Those interviewees did not give in to the inconveniences, sometimes underscoring their identification with “a new generation” that was brought up to demand and not to fear from power. Furthermore, activists saw their protests as even more startling and frightening from the government’s perspective because of how opposite and incongruent their motivations were:

No government in Bulgaria has confronted a situation like this. Nobody is behind us, nobody is paying us; we stand for no other interests but Bulgaria’s: to keep our land and water clean.... My observations, after all these meetings with ministers, MPs, whomever – they are used to making everything for money.... And now they are in a precedent – there is a new generation that cares not for money, but for its land, its clean nature.

Another tenet of the way the Bulgarian government worked according to activists was secrecy and subterfuge. The secrecy around important events such as the Chevron contract, the gas permit auctions, the existing exploration sites and activities, the meetings with company representatives, the agenda of the US officials’ visits – it was a powerful cue for the movement that the government was not to be trusted. These actions “behind the back of the people” also gave a powerful argument for mobilization and for the legitimacy of protest. In line of the view of the government as a power-hoarding agent, many activists saw manipulations and lies in the government actions – in censorship over the media, in innuendos about activists, in populist

appeasing half-measures, in purposely ambiguous terms and legal formulations, in conceding regulations that would never be enforced, and many others. After a time, all actions of the government were interpreted as stratagems with the aim of “pacifying the public and push through fracking in the dark”; as attempts to put things back in the familiar “quiet environment.”

## **Discussion**

### **Back and Front Regions**

The findings and analyses from the study of meaning-making in the anti-fracking movement suggest that a focus on interpretive framing processes is fruitful, but also not straightforward. Strictly back and front regions can be identified, following Kubal’s lead (1998) by examining entirely internal communication such as private interviews with a trusted researcher and entirely external ones like public statements. In the anti-fracking movement there were discussions in closed groups (which can be deemed entirely interpretive); there were press-conferences and negotiations in Parliament (entirely strategic). But between these communicative arenas the processes of meaning-making transcended boundaries and meanings were products of interaction and blurring of back and front regions. As was demonstrated in the previous sections, the anti-fracking movement was in perpetual dialogical interaction (Sternberg, 1999) with the discursive environment, taking cues from opponents, assigning roles for self-proclaimed antagonists, disproving or reframing labels, rejecting or internalizing discourses. Additionally, the boundaries of the meaning-making community were blurred by the activists’ understandings and ways of interacting. Activists considered themselves “the people”; their own role was not to frame messages to the public, but to “reveal the truth” to “people like them.” Interactions with what is usually “the public” happened in face-to-face contacts in streets and public spaces where the other could “sense the energy” and “the authenticity” of the movement. Facebook groups of

up to fifty thousand members facilitated a communication both interpretive and public.

Interpretation and understanding of an issue should take into account the symbolic and practical openness of the interpreting (activist) community. Studying a movement as a producer of frames it then attempts to align with external audiences offers a limited perspective.

### **Higher-order Meanings: Ideologies and Identities in the AFM**

The objects of interpretive framing were connected in higher-order frameworks.

Ideologies and identities in the movement, to the extents of their elaboration, were discussed in the object sections and will be summarized here. The application of well-known ideologies was absent in the meaning-making of the AFM. The thinking about “the system” was ambivalent. On the one hand, activists consciously focused on the issue at hand and rejected “revolutionary” or “nihilistic” challenges like the Communist one. There were both strategic (the direct policy-making negotiations) and cultural (the post-socialist sentiments) reasons for the “apolitical” focus on the issue. But at one point the activists realized in full the systemic issues of power in Bulgaria and discussed more freely (although in closed circles) the political nature of their struggle. This shift was associated with more ideological production, since ideology includes theories of society beyond an issue. The theories that emerged though were pivoted on the fuzzy (and inclusive) concept of “money” as an agent and a motive for the workings of power in the world; sometimes “money” provided individualistic explanations in relation to greed or vanity. Occasionally the money-based explanations turned into conspiracy theories.

The analyses of interviews and discussions suggest that there were no solidified identities in the AFM. First of all, there were two pre-existing activist groups in the movement: environmentalists and Communists, the latter expelled quite early. Identity is often defined as a group-level, not a movement-level phenomenon (Saunders, 2008), and the absence of groups

explains to some extent the absence of identities as Taylor and Whittier (1992) define them. The nature-protector (quasi-)identity was perhaps most comprehensive, connecting to everyday practices and lifestyles. This self-definition though was partly subdued in the public debate where more partial or narrow interests were considered a liability. The “Bulgarian” identity, at first glance “a given” (Gamson, 1991) and universal, was fraught with ambiguities; it served well to unify but less clearly to suggest means or give explanations of actions. “Citizens” was an emergent identity, a process as well as product of meaning-making (Melucci, 1995; Saunders, 2008). It was a very important meaning framework that served mobilization, explanation, and persuasion goals. It did not develop into a solidified and sustainable identity due to, first, its openness: it was opposed to the government, but open to “the people”; and second, its definition within the political conflict, with no prescriptions about everyday life. Non-comprehensive identities and the lack of elaborate ideologies in the AFM served well to boost solidarity among activists by blurring differences, focusing on common interests (Saunders, 2008), and remaining open to newcomers. Additionally, the lack of ideologies helped the movement adapt strategically to the political environment and its populist logic. Unfortunately, the “citizen” identity was unable to extend activism to other issues and to more systemic challenges despite a strong effort in 2013. More exclusive, ideological identities are also more durable (Taylor, 1989).

### **Higher-order Meanings: Discourses and Storylines**

Several discourses can be recognized in the fracking debate; these were ensembles of meanings and meaning-making activities, each with its own vocabulary and logic, allowing activists and opponents to understand and still contest each other’s claims (Hajer, 1995; Steinberg, 1999). As shared languages in use, these discourses were part of interpretive framing, but were not “owned” by the movement, and had very different lives in it. On one extreme, the

economic discourse on fracking was mostly rejected by the AFM. Activists did have to publicly answer questions or react to claims about profitability and economic benefits, the touted roles of investors or value of development, but ultimately economic arguments were brushed away as irrelevant, with a switch to the values of things that “have no price”; in internal discussions the economic arguments were at best ridiculed, most often absent at all. The logic of profitability and monetization of goods or damages was seen as incongruent with life (and nature). Interestingly, activists did talk about efficient natural resources use but (perhaps inadvertently) framed these arguments in a nature-protection key, with tourism and agriculture seen as “natural” and nature-based (traditional and sustainable) activities versus the incongruent gas extraction.

The technological discourse had a different status. At first, it seemed that there would be no common ground for a public debate as activists and opponents clashed around the multivocality of risks: interpreted as “truth” vs. “hysteria.” Later the activists accepted the technological discourse on its own terms and engaged in debates about probabilities, the abstract technoprocess, evidence, expertise and expert roles. Activists attempted to capture that discourse by accumulating and presenting expert knowledge and delegitimizing the expertise of the opponents. At a later (reflexive) stage multivocality was again prominent, with activists proposing new meanings of knowledge and controllability.

An environmental discourse was common within the movement but sparingly used in the public debate. In interviews and discussions activists talked about the inherent value of nature, Earth-scale effects, the needs of future generations, the equal importance of different forms life; in public dialogues nature was mostly a means (a resource, a condition for health), an object in economic or risk discourses. For example, environmentalists argued one time about the contributions of fracking to carbon emissions (a prominent environmental topic), but this point



was virtually absent in the unfolding public debate. The avoidance of an environmental discourse was most likely motivated by its perceived narrowness.

One discourse that both sides engaged in fiercely was the patriot discourse. Under this name I subsume the use of concepts such as national interest, of roles and categorizations such as defenders, traitors, and external enemies, metaphors of robbery and victimhood, etc. The key value of “independence” was contested in its multivocality – with supporters of fracking stressing “energy independence” while activists countering with “food and water independence.” Both sides publicly put themselves in the role of defenders of the country’s interests while depicting the other as paid or unwitting tools of foreign interests. The anti-fracking movement boosted the credibility of their claim by shifting the focus away from Chevron to the technology. They also constantly underscored their own independence and commitment to a national cause.

Finally, the AFM actively used a democracy discourse to its own advantage. They stressed their identity as citizens first, the importance of consent, their protest as a right, and the role of the government as accountable to them. Activists had to counter, within this discourse, a populist interpretation of democracy where the Premier “listens to the people” and the precarious multivocality of “political,” which in Bulgaria commonsensically means “power-motivated.”

To sum up, the analysis of discourses in the AFM demonstrates that indeed, as Steinberg pointed out (1999), discourses are used but not owned by a movement. Discourses have different fortunes: rejected and delegitimized as irrelevant (incongruous) to the issue; accepted and usurped; used internally but subdued in public; contested without closure by virtue of the multivocality of key notions and values. In the “battleground discourses” the AFM strove to demonstrate the greater importance and relevance of its interpretations and/or its greater legitimacy compared to the opponents’.

The discussion of higher-order meanings will be closed with the highlighting of two storylines. Certain discourses contain storylines with typical roles assigned in them (e.g. robbers, defenders, traitors). However, there are storylines that combine elements of different discourses and put diverse actors in acceptable roles (Hajer, 1995). The first such storyline used by the AFM was “Technology is the problem.” In this narrative the main danger was the technology, wielded by greedy corporations; activists were concerned victims; the government was a misguided (by the corporations) ruler who must be turned into a savior. The story was acceptable by the government, with which the activists negotiated; the Premier was used to his role as a savior in his populist style. While the storyline was mostly strategic, in the early days of the movement I registered discussions where activists explained the situation in such terms. In the course of the protest and with increasing awareness among activists, a much more radical storyline emerged: “We are the true government.” In this narrative the government was seen as the main problem, and money was the villain. But more importantly, activists saw themselves as usurping the role of the government in aspects cutting across discourses. The government was traitorous, the activists were patriots; it was incompetent, they were experts; it was corrupt, they were pure; it was undemocratic, they were “the people” and “the citizens.” The government was totally illegitimate to serve the common good, the people, Bulgaria; activists made “true politics.” This radical understanding shaped into concrete demands for a radically participatory democracy in 2013 when the cabinet resigned amid general protests and it seemed that the political system was open for pressure from below. The narrative remained mostly internal, but at two times the technology storyline revealed its nature as a spectacle. Just before votes in Parliament when the ruling party appeared unyielding, activists and deputies would clash and talk about the political undertows of the protests. The activists threatened to turn their protesting from technology to the government.

As a discursive sign of victory, the ruling party would eventually yield to demands with the explanation that they “took a political decision.”

### **Conclusion**

The descriptions and inferences about meaning-making in the AFM should be considered with some limitations. First, the perspectives of participants without online presence are underrepresented as data collection from discussions as collective meaning-making events was conducted in Facebook groups. All interviewees were also digitally connected to the AFM. The study would have benefitted from more personal immersion of the investigator through participant observation, whereby the links between meanings, practices and artifacts of the AFM would have been discerned and explored. Finally, the single case study allows for descriptions of meanings and their consequences; variations among cases within the AFM, such as activists or groups, facilitate explanations of internal processes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), while larger movement-level explanations should be sought with cross-movement comparisons.

As a strength of this investigation, multiple sources and forms of text and image were tapped, from public to semi-public to closed movement groups. Both retrospective and contemporary texts were collected. A novelty was introduced by the use of off-topic Facebook messages. The study of meaning-making in the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria also adds to the scholarship on social movements in several ways. The study differentiated between strategic and interpretive framing, focusing on the latter and comparing the two to arrive at more illuminating conclusions. The diversity, and sometimes controversy, of meaning-making within the movement was captured and shown as productive for movement-wide meanings. Discursive opportunity structures and dialogical cues from opponents were also included in the description of framing processes. Meanings were examined and described at multiple levels, from the

framing of key objects and actors to higher-order meaning ensembles like ideologies, identities, discourses and storylines. Meaning-making mechanisms were studied in their own right as well.

The approach treats meanings in a way that is more comprehensive and discriminative than applying the general concept of frames. The analytical approach facilitated the use and synthesis of less frequent frameworks of studying meaning. It allowed for insights into how meanings were created, elaborated and applied to actions. A richer description than the oft-used diagnostic-prognostic-motivational framing was accomplished. The approach also stayed closer to the analytical logic of qualitative methods and thus lent more credibility to the conclusions and also opportunities to readers to arrive at their own (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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Appendix 1: Images in Meaning-making in the Anti-fracking Movement



*Figure 1.* A protest poster against Chevron. The message is a reference to a famous phrase ascribed to a Bulgarian ruler who repelled a Byzantine invasion into Bulgaria.



*Figure 2:* The anti-fracking movement's logo: burning water. The text reads, "No to shale gas."



*Figure 3.* A movement poster. Female harvesters with gas masks: an example of incongruity.

The text reads, “Save Bulgaria! Say no to shale gas!!!”

Original painting by Vladimir Dimitrov, 1935.





*Figure 4:* A movement poster. A bread fractured by a drill: an example of incongruity. The text reads, “Golden Dobrogea?”



*Figure 5.* A protest poster. Stereotypical American recklessness. The text reads, “Shale gas extraction – Vandal technology, unsuitable for densely populated regions. If you eat bread, this concerns you. Get informed at [www.shalegas-bg.eu](http://www.shalegas-bg.eu)”.

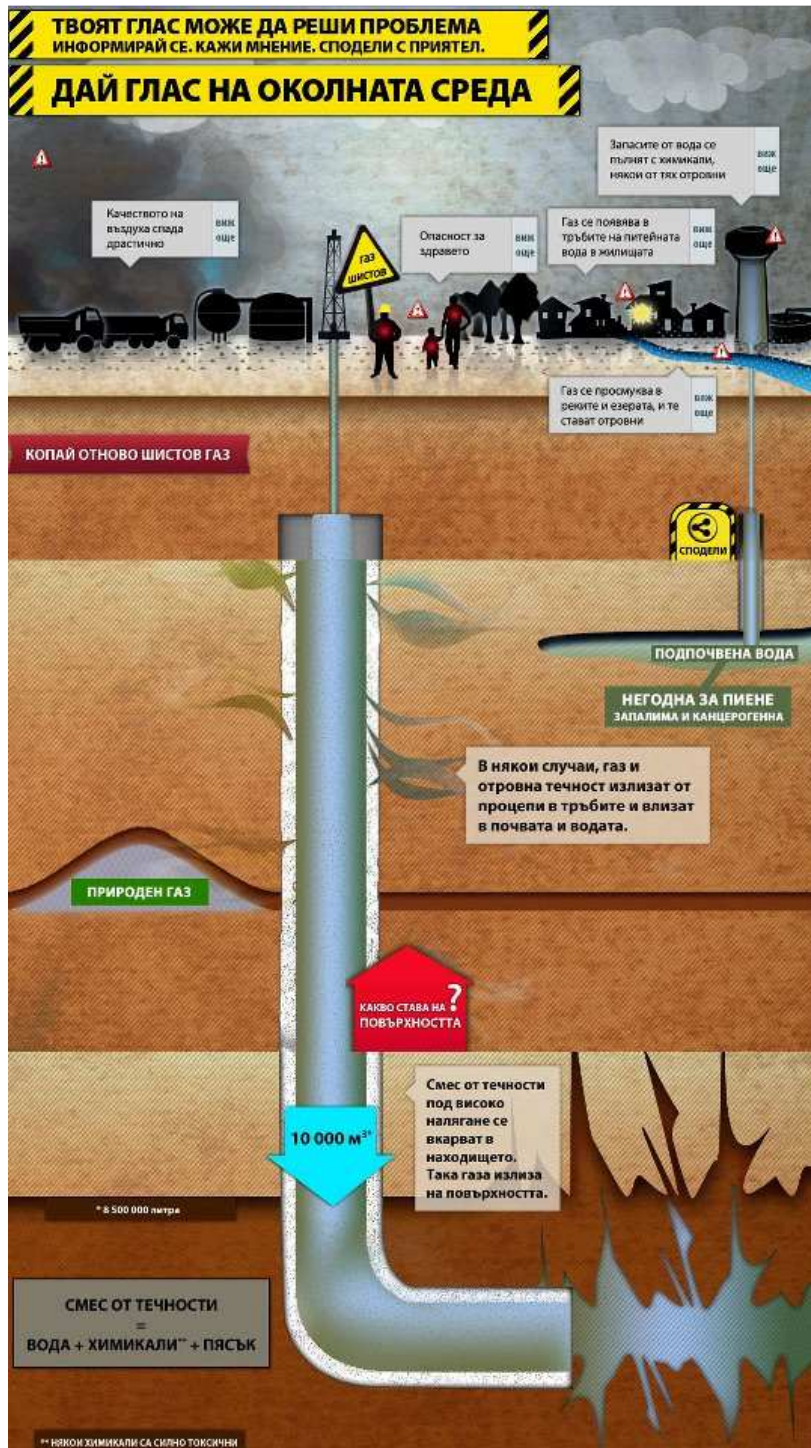


Figure 6. A movement leaflet. Lending a voice to the voiceless. The text reads, “Your voice can solve the problem. Inform yourself. Speak your mind. Share with a friend. LEND YOUR VOICE TO THE ENVIRONMENT”.



*Figure 7.* A protest poster. Incongruity of money and drinking water.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEMOCRACY IN THE ANTI-FRACKING MOVEMENT IN BULGARIA

## **Introduction: Democracy and Social Movements**

Democracy in social movements (SMs) is an increasingly important theme within social movements and also a topic for SM research (Della Porta, 2009). SMs are seen as carriers of alternative visions and practices of democracy in times of crisis of legitimacy for the political system (Bohman, 2000). SMs present a challenge to the latter in two ways. First, they are a mode of political activism that disproves or compensates for the decrease in conventional political participation (e.g. voting), thereby promoting democratic citizen participation, “doing democracy” (Moyer et al, 2001) in otherwise closed and unresponsive polity. Perhaps more importantly, SMs present an alternative to current democratic institutions by being arenas and laboratories for rediscovered and novel practices such as deliberation, direct participation, and consensus decision-making (Cohen, 1989; Della Porta, 2009; Dryzek, 2000; Offe, 1997).

A single-issue movement within a policy-making process framework provides an interesting opportunity to study SM democracy. Democracy is usually studied at the level of a social movement organization (SMO), where practices of decision-making are routine and more straightforward to examine; and where a certain degree of homogeneity of interests and values makes practicing democracy easier. For example, Polletta (2002) studied participatory democracy in American social movements by examining leading SMOs from different waves of activism; Della Porta and her colleagues (2009) studied the global justice movement (opposing corporate globalization) at the level of the SMO as well. The Anti-fracking Movement (AFM), as a single-issue movement, lends itself to the study of democratic practices because there were no clear pre-existing SMOs as participants; the great majority of activists were first-time protesters creating and joining new groups and constructing a common identity and very similar

understandings and practices of democracy via the extensive use of internet communication platforms.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Traditional Models of Democracy**

Democracy means “rule by the people”, which shows from the start its contestable meaning. Held (2006), in his historical analysis of democracy understood and practiced, discusses the ambiguities and controversies of “the meaning of 'political participation', the connotation of 'representation', the scope of citizens' capacities to choose freely among political alternatives, and the nature of membership in a democratic community (p. x).”

It is worth noting that democracy is also a contested value. Philosophers, scholars and politicians from Plato to Madison to Hayek (for a history see Held, 2006) have expressed their doubts and apprehensions about the rule of the many which might result in displacement of “the common good” by the interests of the majority, in oppression of minorities, or simply in short-sighted, irrational, or ill-informed decisions (Schumpeter, 1950). The discussion of the value of democracy is beyond the scope of this text, but my analysis is built on the assumption of the desirability of democracy, which was stated as a value by participants in the AFM in Bulgaria.

Many different models of democracy can be conceptualized; Held described thirteen in the development of political thought and practice in history (2006). He groups them in three broad types: representative, participatory, and deliberative.

Participatory or direct democracy is “a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved” (Held, 2006, p. 4). Citizens participate by voting on all decisions but also by holding public offices. The republics of Ancient Greece or Renaissance Italy were examples of this model, and participatory and “plebiscite” (Schumpeter, 1950)

democracy are more contemporary forms. Following Dewey (1927), contemporary advocates strive for expanding the scope of direct citizen participation by extending the franchise, the scope of the political (e.g. into the workplace, community), the forms and permanence of participation – both voting and action. Held calls this tradition in thinking about democracy “developmental”, because it is based on the belief that participation in the political is a good by itself, and end to be desired. Proponents think of democracy as a necessary element of human development, because of the civic virtue, the empowerment and control over one’s life that it entails.

Representative or liberal democracy is the system of decision-making that uses elected officers who represent the interests of citizens within a frame of “rule of law” (Held, 2006). This group of models starts from the assumption that an individual is the best judge for his or her own development, but not for that of others, so the role of the political system and democracy is to protect his or her pursuits and property from the abuses of a powerful state or citizen majority. The civic sphere and the free market are allegedly where fair and efficient decisions are made. Some more distinguishable contemporary conceptualizations are competitive elitism (Schumpeter, 1950), where democracy means free elections of a governing elite and pluralism (Dahl, 1956), where state and majority power are circumscribed by institutional and legal checks and balances while multiple interest groups and factions vie to promote their interests in policies. In this tradition, political participation is a burden for the individual, democracy does not have an intrinsic value, but is a means to an end – the desired end being personal liberty.

The promise of the “ancient” participatory democracy tradition is extended into a qualitatively new form – deliberative democracy. This is a new model because for the first time the focus shifts on the nature of participation, not just its scope. At the core of the concept of democracy is “the consent of the people” (Held, 2006) as a basis for legitimate decisions: all



people bound by a decision should participate in making it (Bohman, 2000; O’Flynn, 2006).

Deliberative democracy addresses the issue of the quality of consent and proposes a new basis for the legitimacy of democratic decisions.

Existing theories of democracy were criticized by proponents of deliberative democracy as emaciated interpretations of democracy and consent of the people. Democracy understood as elections, or from a purely procedural perspective, leaves out “the substantive representation” (Wedeen, 2008) of citizens in public life, and the nature of their consent and the process of creation of political will. Representative and direct theories start from the assumption that people have political preferences that need only to be expressed through political forms. Elections are aggregations of personal preferences, similar to consumer choice on the market. In contrast, deliberative democracy is about the formation, articulation, and transformation of political positions through a profound process of deliberation, of informed debate and reasoning in public among citizens (Dryzek 2000). Legitimacy comes not from simple aggregation of preferences, but from “reasonable political judgment” (Held, 2006).

Joshua Cohen (1989) elaborated the characteristics of deliberation in important directions. Deliberative democracy in his view is an ongoing and continuous project where decisions are open for revision; deliberation is the main source of legitimacy of decisions; participants have a commitment to respect each other’s differences and plurality of values and goals, as well as each other’s deliberative capacity. Ideal deliberation as a process has several crucial qualities. First, it is free in the sense that participants are bound only by the rules and results of deliberation, and not by authority or coercive force; and in the sense that they can and will act upon the decisions of deliberation as it is sufficient reason to comply. Second, deliberation is reasoned in the sense that participants are required to state the reasons for their

positions, in support or against proposals, and acceptable reasons are the grounds for making decisions. Third, ideal deliberation is equal in two ways: formally equal, meaning its procedural rules pertain to all participants in the same way, insuring equal voice for everyone; substantively equal in the sense that exogenous distribution of power and resources would not influence participant's equal contribution and voice in deliberation. Finally, ideal deliberation is geared toward consensus – finding reasons persuasive to all participants to the extent that they would act upon the decision taken.

Deliberative democracy requires particular attention to communicative mechanisms. According to Bohman (2000), among these “dialogue mechanisms” are making explicit what is latent in common understandings of participants by exchanging and disputing interpretations of common experiences or situations; the discussion of differences in individual and collective biographical or historical experiences among participants, revealing the bases of differing perspectives, understandings, and values; and the application of a given (shared) norm or principle to the particular case at hand, which can articulate commonalities, congruence between values and actions, and different ways to realize a respected principle.

### **Meaning and Praxis of Democracy in Social Movements**

Turning to social movements as arenas and alternatives for democracy, scholars do not measure degrees of democracy against an ideal-type standard, but describe various models of democracy in particular groups and movements (Della Porta, 2009): in constant development, stressing different democratic qualities, shaped by different contextual demands and activist understandings.

#### **Meanings of democracy in social movements.**

*Sources of models.* The main source of models of SM democracy is the legacy or example of other protest movements. SMs can be self-identified as reincarnations or expansions of older movements and sometimes they involve influential groups of veteran activists carrying over the experience of previous challenges (Reiter, 2009). In some cases, for example the peace movement, activist communities encapsulate themselves during times when their issue is out of public favor and build alternative institutions that experiment with SM democracy and keep the torch lit for a new protest cycle (Polletta, 2002). Social movements also do diffusion work where they propagate their models through transnational campaigns and social forums (Della Porta, 2009). Some movements, like the Zapatistas in Mexico, become important reference groups with which other and newer movements identify and try to emulate (Della Porta, 2009). Two other important sources will be examined later in more pertinent sections: politics as usual, which provides negative examples of what democracy is; and private, non-political relationships that activists transplant into SM work (Clemens, 1993). The latter are useful for their familiarity, which translates into predictability and quick adoption as ground rules do not need to be contested and negotiated.

*Reasons for adopting democracy in social movements.* Models of democracy are adopted also with specific self-conscious and purposeful rationales. Traditional narratives about SM form are that activists choose participatory democracy for ideological reasons, then gradually substitute hierarchical structures for instrumental reasons, i.e. to be more efficient in the policy arena. This depiction is criticized by Polletta (2002), as neo-institutional approaches to organizations demonstrate that hierarchical forms can be adapted for symbolic reasons (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Participatory or deliberative democracy (used as synonyms by Polletta) can be also adopted because it fits with the activist identity of the movement's

participants, or boosts the movement's legitimacy with the public or other political actors (Clemens, 1996).

A very important reason to adopt democratic forms is the imperative to oppose politics-as-usual. Adversarial framing and oppositional identity (Gamson, 1992) mean that democracy in a movement is defined as the opposite to the norms, structures and processes in the (disappointing) democratic model practiced in politics. While participation in the policy-making processes pressures SMs to comply with the legitimacy rules of the game that favor centralization and professionalization, at the same time "strong executive power structures ... tend to induce a fundamental critique of bureaucratic and hierarchical political forms, which is then reflected in the movements' emphasis on informal and decentralized structures" (Rucht, 1996, p. 192).

Informality and horizontal relationships are indeed very common to SMs challenging the way politics works (Polletta, 2002). These features are sometimes framed as a preference for prefigurative politics over effectiveness (Della Porta, 2009). In the original definition of the term (Boggs, 1977) it is "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (p. 100). Prefigurative politics was elaborated by Breines (1989) and Epstein (1991) as "building alternatives" (Yates, 2014). A movement builds a community where activists experiment with new social relations and alternative institutions. Reasons for adopting participatory democracy (or any other practice) in a prefigurative way might be strategic rather than escapist (Polletta, 2002): to persuade outsiders in the desirability and viability of new ways, to develop activists and their relationships, or to preserve a practice until a more receptive era.

Finally, as Polletta (2002) argues cogently, participatory democracy can be adopted for strategic reasons because of its benefits. She summarizes them in three groups: solidary, innovative and developmental benefits. First, solidarity in a deliberative group is strengthened because deliberation leads to shared ownership of the decisions and heightened commitment to them. This effect counteracts the usual inability (due to lack of resources) of SM organizations to offer selective rewards for participation. Second, deliberative democracy is conducive to producing innovative strategies and better decisions for political action by allowing multiple points of view and sharing of information on situations of high uncertainty characteristic of extra-institutional pressure (Held, 2006). Finally, deliberative democracy develops human capabilities in a learning process. It trains skills in citizens of public reasoning, engaging with authority, and respectful other-regarding debate. It also fosters a sense of self-efficacy, even to the development of new leaders. These effects are particularly important for previously marginalized and politically inexperienced activists, including in countries with emerging democracy like Bulgaria.

*Contextual demands and models of democracy in social movements.* Specific models of democracy within SMs are adopted also in response to contextual demands – from the social and political environment of a movement. Contextual demands are often framed as a democracy-efficiency dilemma – Polletta (2002) provides a list of external pressures that seem to make deliberation less efficient than hierarchy. Among these, the more important are: the funders’ requirements for bureaucratic procedures; the legislative and executive powers’ expectations for centralized negotiation, professional expertise, and quick reactions to policy windows; the need for unilateral leader action in response to sudden opponent moves; the increasing membership’s demand for simpler and faster decision-making procedures; the need to coordinate local actions

into a national campaign, etc. Conversely, deliberative democracy is most valuable (its benefits maximal) in other contextual conditions. First, the lack of resources, high costs of participation, and the unpopularity of a cause make the solidary benefits of deliberative democracy desirable. Innovatory benefits are crucial in a highly uncertain context, while groups that are embedded in policy-making routines do not need them. Developmental benefits are more important under conditions of political or democratic inexperience, as well as when political gains are expected to be fragile, so long-term development of activist cadre is a movement goal.

*Variations in key concepts in social movement democracy.* Movements and SMOs with different histories, sources of democracy models, contextual demands develop different understanding of key democracy components. Thus often differences between movement democracy forms are due to the meaning they put in apparently identical norms and practices.

Consent of the people, the essential principle of democracy, has many meanings, as Held pointed out (2006), and this plurality is transferred to social movements no less. Della Porta (2009) discerns two conceptions of consensus in the global justice movement. The plural conception emphasizes high-quality dialogue with respect for differences and autonomy of participants where final decision is less important than a mutual knowledge of differences and agreements. In comparison, a communitarian conception of consensus stresses collective agreement that is worked toward in an assembleary tradition and as part of anti-hierarchical identity. Polletta (2002) provides an example by comparing community organizing and direct action democracies. Within the former, agreement is reached before the meeting of community leaders, where the decision is only ratified. For direct action groups this approach is antithetical to consensus, which they understand as a process in meetings with elaborate procedures for deliberation, including rituals of respect and equality.

Other key democracy concepts that vary across groups are equality, inclusion, legitimacy, leadership, and participation. For example, Polletta (2002) underlines the need to allow notions of complex equality – where authority is allowed in some sphere of work, but not in others and overall, and where training and tutoring gradually transfers the authority to others. Without such understanding, equality becomes an obstacle for learning and tutoring in movements.

Participation, as another example, may involve equality of voting on decisions for all members, or equal participation in all movement activities, effectively meaning no division of labor among activists.

**Praxis of democracy in social movements.** Polletta (2002) defines participatory democracy practices in movements as decentralized, non-hierarchical, consensus-based, informal, and cooperative. She also emphasized the importance of deliberative talk and experimentation. The major meta-task in activists' work within movements is to ensure efficiency and equality.

***Relational bases of social movements.*** In her history of major US movements (2002), Polletta found that the disintegration of trail-blazing SMOs like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee or the Students for a Democratic Society happened not due to irreconcilable conflicts of principle or interests (even between old and new generations of activists) but because these communities were no longer capable to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Normative discourse is so prevalent in SMs that conflicts of principle seem prominent; however, it is changes in norms of interpersonal conduct that render deliberation and participation futile means of resolving issues of principle.

In the movements studied by Polletta (2002), for democracy to work, an underlying normative framework of mutual trust, respect, and care was needed. Trust, respect, and care

ensure “fair and fast” decision-making in SMOs, i.e. they help address the efficiency and equality quandaries of movement democracy. Faster decisions are possible, Polletta argues, because mutual respect and care create stable behavioral expectations (predictability), while trust helps deal with departures from rules. Fair decisions are reached because inequities in deliberative capacity, authority, or speaking time are balanced by interpersonal/intimate equality characteristic of positive relationships.

Where do trust, respect, and care come from? Polletta shows that they are transferred to movements at the start from long-term networks of social relationships, from private or semi-private life. Activists come into contentious politics, but they do not want to emulate organizational forms and norms from the political system they challenge. Therefore, they adopt familiar non-political relational forms that provide normative and affective bases for participatory and deliberative democracy. Examples of such forms are the family, the collegial collective, the business partnership, the religious fellowship, the tutelage relationship, or the friendship circles. Such relationships also unfold and thrive in particular settings. These can be semi-private spaces and interpersonal networks like kitchen-tables (Goldfarb, 2007) or qat chews<sup>6</sup> (Wedeen, 2008), religious congregations and groups of friends (Polletta, 2002; Speer & Hughey, 1995), provided that certain processes of deliberation occur, focused on public issues, involving reasoning in public, and entertaining disagreement. Private and semi-private relationships and their settings are especially important for groups that do not have prior experience with political activism – due to marginalization or overall democratic deficit in politics. Thus the relational perspective is very pertinent to emerging democracy societies (Goldfarb, 2007) such as Bulgaria.

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<sup>6</sup> Traditional gatherings in Yemen where men chew the leaves of an alkaloid plant, qat, while discussing social and political issues.



*Deliberate practice of democracy: rules, structures, and relationships building.*

Relational bases provide stability, equality and efficiency, but they come with their own limits and conflict potentials. In Polletta's study (2002), for example, activism based on religious fellowship was resistant to experimenting with new bases of authority and was powerless when dissenters invoked the dictates of conscience. Tutelage purposefully avoided providing clear goals, but in times of uncertainty and urgency this bred frustration and conflict. Friendship has the darker sides of exclusivity and conformity; informality hinders the establishment of rules protecting equality and often results in power to informal cliques (Freeman, 1973).

New movements possess the advantage of using learning from positive and negative experiences and can support the practice of internal democracy via rules, structures, and relationship-building activities. Polletta (2002) describes rules allowing expertise and expert authority to coexist with equality and protecting minorities in decision-making, for example codes for communication during deliberation and complex rules for degree of consensus and for temporary authority on certain decisions. Polletta emphasizes rules making complex equality explicit and viable as a means of using expertise. Deliberative democracy movements also have "structures of cooperation" – group formats that have a dual function – plan and execute actions, but also foster new kinds of relationships among participants different from conventional political interaction and familiar private relationships. Thus deliberative democracy movements purposefully nurture mutual trust, respect, and care among their members.

What all of these practices must provide for, in Polletta's view, is deliberation and experimentation in a movement. These are the two defining features of movement democracy. Deliberation is facilitated by practices of reasoning, argumentation, norms of equality, sincerity and respect. Experimentation and innovation are key conditions for movement democracy as it

constantly examines and reflects upon its own working (Bohman, 2000). For Polletta, crucial is the generation of new bases for legitimate authority and leadership – alternative to power, credentials, and money. Without this experimenting, deliberative democracy cannot offer much to challenge the political status quo.

### **The Study of Democracy within the AFM**

When applying the theories and concepts of movement democracy to the case of the AFM, several themes and topics can be distinguished. The study will examine the understanding of democracy within the movement in order to describe it in its own terms. The local meaning of key concepts will be clarified: consent, equality, plurality, participation, deliberation, authority/leadership and its legitimacy. The sources of democracy meanings will be probed, including negative definitions. Reasons for adoption should be explored – (oppositional) identity, legitimacy, ideologies, familiarity, strategy (and perception of benefits), and the presence of prefigurative politics. The activists' perceptions of the contextual demands of the political environment will also be examined as shaping forces for movement democracy. Then, the relational bases and settings for movement practices will be examined – their characteristics, norms and affective dimensions. Finally, meanings and will be shown in their embodiment in movement practices, key processes, rules, and structures such as decision-making, representation, delegation of power to leaders. When evaluating SM democracy, we can compare its characteristics against normative models, and also in the terms of the particular movement.

### **Methods**

The study of movement democracy was based on accounts of participants containing key ideas and perspectives on events, and on records of discussions of movement actions and strategy. These texts were analyzed for key topics related to democracy within the AFM.

## **Data Collection**

**Interviews.** Current and former activists from the AFM were interviewed to both understand personal meanings of democracy and its basic elements, and obtain individual accounts of the processes and practices of movement democracy. Interviewees were sampled purposefully for a maximum variation in experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994), with most important differences being between positions of power vs. supportive ones, Sofia vs. country groups, and staunch vs. dissident (including ousted) activists. A total of twenty-four activists from seven cities were interviewed from March 2012 through August 2013. The interviews were semi-structured (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), with some of the questions referring to democracy topics such as decision-making, leadership, participation, and Sofia-country-relationships. For more information, see Methods section of Paper 2.

**Movement records and documents.** Textual data were collected in the course of movement actions and retrospectively, mostly from Facebook-based archives. Facebook was the main platform for internal communication, file exchange, data collection and banking, and decision-making. Facebook groups were semi-private movement spaces where current and general issues were discussed with much candor and bluntness. Two-hundred Facebook discussions from the national and local groups were selected with a judgment of their relevance to the topic of inquiry. Additional attention was focused on discussions around key decisions, conflicts, deliberations on tactics and strategy. The discussions were a primary source of data on movement democracy as they contained live deliberations, interactive construction of meanings and discursive practices. In addition, twenty-two sets of minutes from national and local group meetings were included in data collection to capture the outputs of deliberations.

Other sources of data were used as well; particularly participant observation of one

protest and observations of video footage provided a small amount of contextual knowledge of movement practices.

### **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data were analyzed in two cycles (Saldana, 2009): for summarizing and labeling meanings, and for building categories and links between them. MaxQDA software was used for coding and sorting the data. Both structural coding (Saldana, 2009) based on pre-defined theoretical topics and open coding for emerging categories (Charmaz, 2006) was applied. In a second stage of coding I coded within and across segments, reflected on the data and wrote analytical memos (Charmaz, 2006). Open-coded segments were analyzed with the constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) to create more general categories, which in turn were compared and expanded with newly-coded statements. More details on the approach to analysis and the ensuring of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are presented in Paper 2.

### **Findings**

#### **“Democracy” in the Movement**

The anti-fracking movement was a cause-driven movement, but as the second study demonstrated, a strong citizen identity developed in its course: “people turned out as citizens, for democracy and transparency,” “nature coming third for them,” “mad at the powers that be,” “fighting for democracy.” The dialectics of the cause (and its pragmatic priorities) and the ideal society (and its prefigurative practices) permeated the thinking and debates on how the AFM should run itself. Democracy is an ideal for social movements as a strived for state of society and/or as a modus operandi of the movement itself, an alternative society (Della Porta, 2009; Polletta, 2002). In the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria, both ideals were present; while this

study is focused on democracy within the movement, the narratives of activists about society and “the system” reveal understandings of what democracy is for them.

At first glance there was a surprising paucity of the use of the word “democracy” by activists in discussions and interviews; furthermore, sometimes they used it ironically with qualifications such as “this ‘democracy’”, “American democracy” (meaning fake), “pseudodemocracy” or “democradcia” (a pun in Bulgarian combining the words “democracy” and “theft”). Such use of the word demonstrates the activists’ resentment of politics in Bulgaria which to them was democratic in name only. The understanding of “true” democracy or democracy within the movement was often constructed in opposition of the political democracy, as will be demonstrated below.

Upon further investigation into the texts, the most wide-spread notion of democracy is in the sense of consent of the people affected by a decision, a basic definition of democracy (Held, 2006). Activists often complained about “the unbelievably impudent intrusion in people’s lives, worked out in secret, behind people’s backs” and framed the AFM as a protest that “makes our voices heard.” Ruling without consent was generalized beyond the fracking issue, to judgments like “communism or democracy [alike], it’s evident that we [the people] are not in charge.” As anti-fracking activists identified themselves as “the Bulgarian people,” the flaw of political democracy became that “the people have no real power.” A secondary meaning – democracy as a rule of the majority – came as a logical consequence. With perceptions and narratives of corrupt, incompetent politicians, participants condemned representative democracy as a system where “nobody represents us.” In many discussions and interviews activists extolled the virtues of “direct democracy” and “a referenda state.” These notions and ideals influenced the ways of the movement democracy.

## **“The Civic Society”**

The anti-fracking movement was a means to make the government hear the voice of the people; how was the voice of activists heard within the movement? Movement democracy was indeed a cherished goal by most activists, but its meanings and limits varied across people and times. Perhaps as a reaction to the negative notions of political democracy, activists more often talked about “civic society” when they described alternative and prefigurative practices within the movement. “Civic society” as a translation of the Bulgarian term reflects a double meaning I sensed in its usage. First-time activists tended to use the term in the sense of “a society of citizens,” referring to their particular movement, and infusing it with prefigurative notions of a better society. Green activists from the non-profit sector were sometimes irked by the notion that the AFM was a novel alternative, “the birth of civil society in Bulgaria.” Environmentalists had been engaged in “civil society” (in the sense of broadly focused organized, network, informal, and even business) activities to preserve nature for years. The difference in meanings played out in two different ways the protests were perceived by activists: as a new alternative to government vs. as a campaign; a more idealistic vs. a more pragmatic activity.

The negative examples and experiences of actual democratic politics and government in Bulgaria was a major reference point for how activists imagined their civic society should function. What was considered right and legitimate democratic process within the movement was based on several types of opposition to Bulgarian politics. First, the secrecy of government decisions taken “behind people’s backs” was countered with transparency and “glasnost” within the movement. “Glasnost” was a norm and expectation for everyone to disclose their actions and plans. For example, the group from Sofia posted minutes from their meetings on the national Facebook group (a closed group with members from all local groups). Another opposition was

between the government's coercion and the freedom from coercion in the AFM where "there's no boss to tell you what to do." The formal hierarchy of the institutions was contrasted to the informality and meritocracy in the AFM where "everyone finds his place." The "suppression of discussion" and of voice by the government was opposed to the "constructive dialogue" among activists. Finally, the corrupted interests of money and profit that drove the government were contrasted to the absolute norm of selflessness and dedication to a common cause in the movement. In a radical and proudly incompatible opposition to the government and politics as usual, activists saw their "true civic society" as transparent, free, informal, dialogical and cause-driven alternative. Representative democracy was seen as a set of formalities designed to keep power away from people. Activists wanted and practiced a participatory and direct alternative.

The civic society had several important characteristics whose meanings determined what was acceptable and right for participants. Perhaps the most important notion was "naturalness." "Naturalness," "spontaneity," and "informality" were descriptions and evaluations of how most democracy practices in the movement happened. "Naturalness" was used in interviews and discussions as the opposite of and the alternative to hierarchy, artificial and arbitrary assignment of work, and material or egocentric interests.

"Formal structures" "repel people and make everything disintegrate," stated activists; "people are scared by bureaucracy, paperwork." Structures determine "what you should do or who to work with" and thus limit personal freedom. Formal rules and positions were seen as features of organizations, synonymous with politics, procedural bickering and private interests; "when you start making structures things go down the usual way." There were attempts by single activists or pre-existing groups (some coming from professional or party backgrounds) to formalize rules for conduct or procedures for decision-making. They were all rejected with

descriptors such as “regimentation,” “artificial,” “dictatorial,” “petty,” “like signing off every day that you love your wife.” A call for a focus on procedures was deemed distracting from the urgency of the cause, as pedantic, even self-serving. “Concrete work being done makes things go smoothly. But when you turn to organizational issues – minutes, signing, quorum – it’s a riot.”

In addition to “naturalness” as opposition to organization as usual, it was also seen as the way to transcend the human deficiencies of participants themselves. In this sense “natural” stood for “not made up by us” and thus inherently right, universal and legitimate (Douglas, 1986). Activists legitimized certain practices and power imbalances in the movement as “natural” when they were shaped by factors outside the movement: talents, gender, location. Some activists in their interviews preferred “natural leaders” to “officialized” leaders who were voted for because the latter would beget constant personal conflicts or become corrupted by power. Even when the movement had to vote for a required legal representative of the national petition drive, the vote was avoided “naturally” by one of the nominees voluntarily stepping down: “a woman [would be] better to stand in front, and she also had longer experience.” “Naturalness” legitimized the way leaders and speakers emerged, work was distributed, discussions transpired, decisions were made, accountability was performed, people joined or dropped out of the movement.

Another important notion in the civic society was freedom. It was highly valued and appreciated as the mode of action at the individual level. In the AFM “everyone does only what he agrees with”; “there is nobody to control or centralize things”; “nobody can impose a decision, because nobody is dependent, we are all volunteers.” This freedom from control and command was contrasted to the hierarchical and coercive relationships in political or business organizations. It was seen as the only possibility for a collective of “wild individualists.” Only such freedom produced “self-initiative” and “personal self-control.” In the end “multiple parallel



strategies existed” in the movement and this was considered a strength. “Coordination” was used instead of “organization.” With the “naturalness” of informal coordination “everyone does what his strength is” and “the puzzle fits itself” – two often used expressions that expressed meritocracy and legitimacy.

Lastly, the understanding of the civic society of activists cannot be full without their notion and use of “cause.” The focus on a cause made the civic society different from a political group that promotes “ideological” goals. The “cause” was also often seen as the only unifying power for the “all very different” participants. The appeal to the cause was an ultimate argument in discussions, a plea for unity and cohesion during conflicts. Proposed ideas or actions were often delegitimized as “diversions from the cause.” Especially suspect were procedural or “organizational” questions; they were often interpreted as serving one’s egoistic interests. Activists were expected to fall in line, to sacrifice their egos for the cause. Very importantly, many decisions and actions were legitimized with their contributions for the cause, their impact, and not with their process. Pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) was a very common principle in judging how things are done in the AFM.

Appeals to the cause were problematic once processes of disintegration and expiration of trust had started in the movement. Very similar to Polletta’s (2002) description of appeals to personal conscience in the faith-based peace movement that turned self-serving, on two occasions in the AFM leaders threatened to leave the movement “for the sake of the cause” if other activists did not agree with them. They justified their ultimatums as situations where a contrary decision by the majority would render the leader a liability for the cause. In both cases the other activists supported the leaders, not without angry dissident voices.

### **Key Characteristics of Democracy in the AFM**

**Power and equality.** The first important element of democracy within AFM was the question of power distribution and its legitimacy. Authority and equality are crucial issues in social movements, a source of both productive action and conflict (Polletta, 2002). One of the most evident descriptions of the AFM by activists was that it was a movement “without leaders,” “without chiefs,” “horizontal,” “decentralized.” “Leaders – there is really no such thing,” one activist affirmed. In the AFM “people don’t have a boss,” there was “nobody on top of those below.” This understanding of leadership came from the perceptions of the political and party system in Bulgaria where a leader “controls” and “gives orders.” The movement provided an alternative for activists who thought of themselves as “a new generation” where “people don’t want to sit and stare up at somebody’s mouth.” Another important meaning of this eschewed leadership was that it was formal. Formal leadership, even if activists themselves voted for a leader, was seen as “regimentation,” as disruptive of the “natural” way people “found their place” in the movement. A collective without formal leadership had practical benefits: no leaders meant less vulnerability because there would be “no targets for external pressure” and “smearing”; no less importantly, activists believed that formal leaders would “make people complacent,” relieve them from responsibility to act and to take initiative – a key feature of volunteer participation. With these two arguments leaderlessness in local groups was promoted by the environmentalist activists from Sofia. Another rationale against formal leadership was that it would unleash ego conflicts where people would start opposing collective actions because of interpersonal issues with a formal leader.

Some activists admitted the possibility of informal leaders and elaborated their role in ways that understated their power. First, “a true leader” was described as a person who “merely expresses the opinion of the people [in the movement],” having “left his personal interest or

opinions aside.” This spokesman function was contrasted to the flawed representation in politics. Another key characteristic of a leader came from the reverence for action in the AFM: a leader was anyone who was “most active,” “does the most things”; leadership was a burden carried by those who “sacrificed themselves before the eyes of the others.” My interviews are peppered with personal stories of interpellation, of people who felt that something important had to be done and volunteered because no one else would. For example, signing a document addressed to an institution or speaking in front of a microphone were seen as uncomfortable activities by most participants. Leadership was thus associated with responsibility and not with power or privilege. Finally, a leadership function was described with the word “coordinator.” A coordinator was a person who would help self-directed volunteers merge their efforts for a concrete action like a protest or leaflet passing. She does not give orders; only transmits information. The role was seen as natural for a movement based on individual initiative and action.

The understatement of power – either by rejecting leadership or by relegating it to a non-privileged status – was easier with regard to simple and straightforward movement activities, especially protests. As one rank-and file activist summed up, “the strategy was clear: we are against; the tactics were clear too: we jump on the square; there was nothing to discuss.” Early in the rise of the AFM and also later in groups outside Sofia, protests were a matter of “who and how, not what.” But with the engagement in policy-making and proposing of different strategies and solutions, three types of power positions emerged that were more difficult to legitimize.

Activists who engaged in three activities – strategizing, representing, and policy-making – had disproportional power in the sense that they were able to influence the direction and outcomes of the movement. First, in a movement where “everybody is free to propose ideas” and “multiple parallel strategies exist,” whose ideas become movement actions? The AFM resembled

a free market where activist-entrepreneurs would sell their ideas and organize their realization in competition with others. Such leaders would propose an initiative, “persuade others the idea would be useful,” “run after it,” “become the motor,” “persuade others to help” and sometimes “get into arguments” to “defend your ideas... pushy or not.” Some of the milestone actions of the AFM – for example, the national petition drive, a legal appeal to the European Commission, a letter to all political parties – were executed by small teams led by the idea proponent, sometimes unbeknown to other activists.

Most activists saw this manner of strategizing as legitimate because it was an extension of the personal freedom within the movement and it rewarded the most active members. This freedom of initiative might have been seen as egalitarian, but the patterns of success of movement entrepreneurs revealed the sources of disproportionate power. First, activists from Sofia were closer to national institutions and their ideas had much more potential for policy impact through direct pressure. And second, people with experience and connections from previous social actions, mostly environmentalists, had the networks to quickly summon and organize teams to work on an initiative or to “consolidate around an idea” before it was proposed for discussion. The initiative of the entrepreneurs had some limits: ideas that were perceived as politically tinted (e.g. appealing to a particular political party) or materialistic (e.g. soliciting help from businesses) were unacceptable and sometimes lead to internal conflicts.

The second position of power was that of “faces of the movement,” i.e. representatives or speakers. Their role was to speak for the anti-fracking cause to the media, in public debates, ultimately for the mass audience. Their influence was in the opportunities to persuade others, to make ad hoc decisions about messages, to create an image of the movement for the mass public. Activists defined the role in an egalitarian way by understating the powers (the speakers merely

expressed the common opinion), by emphasizing the burdens and sacrifices of exposing oneself in public, and by declaring that anyone was free to take up the role. Meritocratic explanations stated that the speakers were people who had sensitivity to the “main accents within the movement” and authenticity to present them, as well as a skill of explaining complex issues in simple terms. Thus representatives emerged “naturally” within the collectivity of free activists; formal procedures were in fact deliberately avoided. A “natural” determinant for the speaker in two groups was gender: she was a woman. A deeper examination of the speakers’ emergence shows more factors at play. First of all, this role was most often solicited by external agents, the media or the government; and it was the media or the government that legitimized certain activists as speakers. For example, a few activists were well-known to the media because they had participated in previous protest movements; it was convenient for journalists to go to them for opinions. Even more importantly, government figures and the Premier himself invited particular activists to meetings and thus picked representatives. This was a very different process from the extolled interpellation within the movement. It also meant that activists from Sofia had a disproportionate opportunity to speak for the AFM; the proximity to institutions of political power granted power to Sofia activists. A milestone event demonstrated the inequality within the movement: Sofia activists pressed the Premier to invite them for a meeting by holding banners at a football game where he played with foreign diplomats. The meeting was known in advance and there was a push from many local groups to elect national representatives from various cities to attend. The Sofia group held the communication channel with the Premier’s office and collected information on a very popular leader outside Sofia, vetting him as a representative. In the end, the Sofia core of activists went to the meeting alone, without prior notice, citing “objective factors” such as the lack of time and the regulated access to the government building. In later

interviews those activists shared that they mistrusted the local leader as politically-driven and too esoteric-minded to represent the movement. This episode created a big rift within the movement, with some “democracy-minded” people opting out. While many activists, including some from Sofia, vehemently protested this *fait accompli* with arguments in the spirit of democracy, another argument trumped them: the meeting was deemed a success. Voices for movement democracy were silenced with what became a very common argument: “it is the cause that matters, not your egos,” i.e. results are more important than process.

The third position of disproportionate power within the movement was held by activists who directly participated in the creation of the fracking moratorium (i.e., in policy-making). This job involved collecting data, drafting texts, defining technical and legal terms, negotiating the proposals with politicians, lobbying and making on-the-fly decisions about compromises on the policy. These were diverse activities, but they were accomplished by a small team of about five activists. The power of the policy-making role was understated in its own ways. First, the negotiators and others alike described the positions mostly as work of a speaker. The main negotiator was the only activist voted for within the movement when the group had to select a representative for the national petition drive. An important dissident voice told me in his interview, “We agreed that she would represent us for the media, they obviously thought she should represent us with regard to the drafting of the text.” Policy-making power was not a result of misunderstanding or malign intentions though. In my interviews both negotiators and others talked about the persuasion of politicians as “telling the truth”; for both (ignorant) politicians and the mass public the movement’s main strategy was “the truth only.” In this narrative there was not much room for discretion; instead, speakers were familiar with and good at explaining the truth about fracking. Furthermore, during meetings with politicians the activists emphasized they

had no control over the crowds; everything was spontaneous; no negotiation was possible (cf. Polletta, 1998). The activist who led the negotiations described the equal importance of people on the streets, “the crazies,” and the “rational core” negotiating inside.

In instances when the concentration of power was admitted it was legitimized by the high priority of results for the cause. “To me the most important is the effect... sometimes it is not even so important how democratic it is, because what’s the point if the result is zero,” stated a leading local activist who had otherwise endured much criticism from the negotiating team for being “stickler to procedures.” This pragmatic legitimacy was buttressed by a specific understanding of accountability within the movement. One of the leading activists from Sofia shared in his interview that “one of the most right steps” after the meeting with the Premier was that he “sat and wrote down an account of what happened... it was shared by more than a thousand people on Facebook... and thus we gave glasnost to the information – what really happened inside... This hadn’t happened before... and we did it for all meetings after.” It appears that this transparency or “glasnost”, contrasted to decision-making behind closed doors typical for the government, was enough for a majority of activists to feel involved in the negotiations.

Upon deeper and more critical examination the power of the policy-making team within the movement seems less shared and penetrable. First, as with the other positions of power, being in Sofia, “close to the institutions,” provided both the opportunity and the legitimacy (as “natural”) to take up the role. Related to that, but more important, policy-making activists had prior experience, connections with politicians and connections with activists from prior protests. When a Member of Parliament presented a draft for a moratorium in the movement’s Facebook group he was “monstrously defamed” by rank and file activists; at the same time, the policy-

making AFM leader established a private contact with him and made corrections to his draft. In her interview the leader talked about the multiple connections she had with politicians (including Facebook friendships) established during anti-GMO protests in 2008. She was also well-established and connected among environmental networks and activists which allowed her to recruit an unofficial expert team that eventually drafted texts. This closeness to power, which most activists in principle abhorred, was justified as a dedication to the cause: “I talk with absolutely everyone, only the goal matters... I don’t care. I go to the ruling party, to the other, to the fifth, to the ninety-ninth.”

In the course of the campaign such positions of power became more entrenched and less accountable. After the “working core” team consolidated it became exclusive on the basis of efficiency: “Including new people is labor-consuming; we have a working core of people who understand each other with a glance...our rules are unwritten... there is a certain teaming up and the rest should simply trust what they see and know.” Also pragmatically but even less transparently, the “core” developed reasoning more germane to the adversarial powers: “to report things from the [negotiations] kitchen is counterproductive... you report to a mass of anonymous people... often when I am planning something it is vitally important that information about it does not break to the people on the other side, those whom I am going to.” The exclusiveness of the negotiating team lead some disgruntled activists to see what had been “merely expressing” and “telling the truth” as arbitrary selection from the information, texts and arguments supplied by the rank and file; negotiators were a filter, not just a funnel, and their judgments were not discussed. Another troubling development happened with the practice of “glasnost” that legitimized the negotiating team. Reporting from the negotiations became mediating between “the people” or “the crazies” and the policy-making process. The negotiating leader talked about



the importance of “explanations and connection”: “people on the street do not have to know the technology of negotiations, who participates in them, but they should know the texts they are fighting for... it is very labor-consuming to give information to the people outside, they cannot understand it and it takes the time of the most important people... [it is worth] only when the text concerns them.” The negotiators gradually became a sort of experts, “the thinking model,” judging what “the people outside,” “the crazies,” should know and what not. In several important discussions on the results of meetings with officials, dissenting or skeptical voices were persuaded with arguments of hermetic knowledge such as “the text was sent to experts and jurists abroad,” “we have set a mechanism in action, which we will discuss in person and then comment on our strategy.” And the insiders also had the power to define success, the basis for pragmatic legitimacy in the movement. When the outcomes of negotiations were questioned, insiders used witness accounts and cultural rationality to claim success – “the Premier was really surprised,” “he looked concerned,” “the lobbyists were sad in the end.” In the beginning there was much good will and trust showing in the discussions among activists and the power of the “core” was accepted. As time passed more and more activists questioned the exclusivity of power in the movement.

To summarize the findings on power and equality, there were two tendencies in the AFM. First, power was understated for the sake of equality by rejecting the existence of controlling and commanding leaders; also, leadership was defined as burdensome and interchangeable, the taking up of the most activity. In the early stages of the movement (and also in local groups) the simple nature of protests made such understatement possible. Second, power was legitimized for three roles in the movement through pragmatism (the imperative of the cause) and naturalness. Powerful positions were seen as a result of everyone informally and freely “finding their place,”

“their strengths,” the latter being predetermined by “natural” factors such as location, prior experience, or even gender. Freedom, meritocracy, naturalness and pragmatism were an alternative to a hierarchical politics.

**Participation and inclusion.** Active participation and openness were two important characteristics of the AFM. There was a very strong appreciation and valuing of action as the substance and expression of participation. Activists expected from each other to go above and beyond discussing and to “be the motors of their ideas.” “Everyone gives it all, whatever he can, but the important thing is to give.” Facebook, while appreciated as a coordination and communication instrument, was dismissed as “a chatter room” when compared to “going in the streets.” “People with many ideas” were often suspect as “looking from the sideline”, even as “giving orders.” Such perception has a clear link to the meanings of power as control and command. Informal leaders, on the other hand, were those who took on most of the work. Action was also seen as the most important form of consent: “those who disagree with a decision do not participate in its execution; the [executions of] decisions where more people participate are more consensual and therefore get realized.”

For those who wanted to act, to do something for the cause, the movement was open. The boundaries of participation were very porous – at the level of meanings there was no clear line between “us” and “them,” as demonstrated in the second paper. In terms of practices, local and Facebook groups were freely accessible. When local groups gathered, the walking in and out of people, some of them first-time attendees, created great difficulties for decision-making, but was nonetheless appreciated as informal and inclusive. New members were seen as joining through interpellation, just as local leaders emerged – they saw a need for their action, and they acted.

While participation was preferred over delegation, there were important elements of movement work where openness and inclusion were not expected and practiced. There was a closed Facebook group, “the national group,” for coordinating and discussing the national campaign. I was in the group and my impression was that it was not too impenetrable (with over 120 members), the main criterion being that the person had shown herself as active and interested. Interviewees did not find it contradictory that there was a closed group in a movement “of the people” because “anyone can join.” The truly delegated roles, the power positions of speakers and policy-makers, were legitimized pragmatically: there were limits (of time, space and process) imposed by institutions and some people were most effective at getting results.

There were limits to self-initiated action and instances when people were ousted from the movement. The comparison between local groups and the Sofia group and the analysis of internal conflicts and ostracizing suggests that protest actions were welcome but policy-related initiative was suspect. Some members were ousted because of their consistent opposition to the judgments of the negotiating “core.” Their exclusion was legitimized with the claims that the opposing behavior is “harmful for the cause,” “sowing discord,” “an act of sabotage.” Another explanation was that such people were ego-driven or worse, politically-motivated. These two motivations were incompatible with the cause. In any case, exclusion was very often seen as “natural” and “a self-removal”: a person did not join the action and gradually dropped out; another one’s ego was too strong and he couldn’t accept others to lead; the “politically ambitious” and “quarrelsome” lost people’s confidence. Participation in the AFM was open but demanding.

**Deliberation, decisions, and consent.** Deliberation within a movement impacts the quality of group decisions and the degree of their acceptance. Not surprisingly, discussions and

decisions in the AFM were made “naturally” and “spontaneously” according to many activists. Decisions were taken “by consensus”; voting was avoided whenever possible. In-person meetings in local groups were informal: “no procedures, no rules, no roles, no leader.” Two understandings of democratic decisions clashed in one local group when a Communist subgroup demanded “minutes, voting” while “the independents wanted a discussion of things and the acceptance, somehow along the way, of an opinion liked by everyone.” The perception of procedures as artificial and illegitimate was very common. The lack of deliberative structure produced meetings that went slowly, inefficiently, with many distractions and subtalks splitting off the main discussion. In Sofia sometimes the discussion of an important proposal would start with a “shouting match” between “two or three people, the rest looking on,” followed by “a calmer discussion, and ending with a conclusion of what the best decision would be.” Only one local group in Dobrich, after “many fruitless meetings” that turned into “an incredible chatter room,” decided to invite an external moderator to facilitate discussion. The results were astounding, and the group practiced facilitated deliberation from then on; however, no other group was interested in that experience. To the perception of informality as “natural” contributed the relational experiences and settings that first-time activists brought into the movement – meetings would be held in cafes, parks, pubs as conversations between friends. Some relational norms were pointed out by interviewees as crucial for consensus in informal deliberation: “don’t get personally offended,” “subdue your ego,” “give reasons and ground your opinions.”

On Facebook deliberation was similarly unstructured but there was one important rule for quicker decisions in the “national group”: when a decision was proposed (almost always by the Sofia group), members had a day or two to express opinions; only those who disagreed were expected to post; the rest could “like” the proposal and whoever remained silent was considered

in favor. In this way decisions were quick but disagreement was quite onerous and difficult for more timid voices.

There was also a difference between deliberations on concrete tasks where “not what, but who and how” was discussed (e.g. details of a coming protest action) and on “strategies, more general questions.” The former seemed to flow “naturally” and “spontaneously”; some interviewees described “switching to concrete tasks” as a tactics in a heated discussion, to dissipate conflict on a more general issue. The discussions on strategy, on the other hand, were illustrative of the difficulties of unstructured deliberation. Disagreements and contradictions on such important topics were not explored deeply; they were avoided and “extinguished.” A case in point was a proposal of one of the informal leaders to publicly thank the Premier for the ban, with the intention to support his position in the face of a looming US diplomatic offensive. The idea caused a flurry of opinions, with 163 postings total. I observed very little, if any, attempts at mutual understanding and a deeper exploration of the differences and the purposes of positions. In a way, two storylines of the problem clashed in the discussion – whether the government was the savior to whom the victims would thank or whether the citizens were the heroes who made the government do its job. A lot of activists were offended that “a humiliating” narrative should be offered publicly. There was no distinction between tactics and internal framing. The deliberation was peppered with conversational tactics to divert or avoid contradiction. The author of the idea declined to set up an online poll because “debate gives birth to truth” and in the end withdrew his proposal (the prevailing number of opinions supported his idea) stating he was “incredibly happy to be able to discuss together,” that his “secondary goal was to learn how to go ahead together” and he pointed to “how different we are but how united for the cause”.

Avoidance of controversy was also opted for when one of the leaders stepped down when a vote had to be made for a national petition initiative. Another leader told me how she “sensed” the opinions of members when she posted an idea and looked at reactions; when there was a number of disagreeing opinions, she would drop the proposal. At a conversational level, tactics to avoid or downplay contradiction included jokes, phrases in funny dialects, and “you are both right” statements. Very common were appeals in capital letters and with lots of exclamation marks of the type “while we bark at each other the rigs are working... let us all focus our efforts on the essentials that unite us!” Less positive were arguments like “you are far away [abroad]... trust the judgment of people who look people in the eyes here”; some particular activists resorted to personal attacks against perceived “ego-driven” dissenters.

The avoidance of contradictions was sometimes achieved preventively by avoidance of exploration and reflection on how deliberation happened in the AFM. Proposals for discussion of rules of deliberation failed (at least three times). Activists from the Occupy Movement (which had some Bulgarian followers at the time) were labeled “windbags” for their focus on process. Attempts to discuss the quality of discussions were seen as distractions, ego-serving, narcissistic. In their majority, activists seemed to have accepted that they are “very different” and that only the cause, not the process, can unite them. The avoidance of reflection and contradiction was especially evident in the treatment of mistakes. Mistakes were either not accepted as such, in the fortifying myth that a greater force led activists, or criticism was dismissed with the common “do it yourself then” (again with a focus on action). Another negative of unstructured deliberation was that, according to some more reflective interviewees, many people left the movement because they got exhausted by a protest where, on the one hand, a lot of effort was spent on

negative action (protests), while on the other hand there was no internal system for supporting people's voices and expression of needs.

### **Relational Norms**

These arrangements of movement democracy were facilitated by certain relational norms (Polletta, 2002). In her study of grassroots democracy Polletta (2002) shows the crucial importance of norms of interpersonal conduct for ensuring "fair and fast" decisions and actions, i.e. both efficiency and inclusiveness. While she focused on trust, respect, and care, in the study of the AFM trust, tolerance, and humility stood out as very common and important norms.

Trust was both an outcome of prolonged face-to-face contact and a threshold requirement for entry into collective action. Many interviewees praised personal and multiple contacts as the means for building trust, for "providing solder" among activists. Local groups became very cohesive quickly, and many activists purposefully travelled between groups to make acquaintances and "see what people do" because "live contact is everything." These gradual processes of getting to know each other were accompanied by a somewhat paradoxical requirement to trust other activists from the moment of entering the movement. Participants shared how Facebook made it possible for "absolute strangers" to get together. Such trust, or "trustfulness," was seen as characteristic for "this peculiar society, the citizen movement." "If you approach something with fear nothing will come out of it. We must overcome the fact that there will always be provocateurs, paid agents, but we need to believe that we are good, we will be more, and we will be better". Some activists explained the trustfulness with a general "Southern mentality"; others saw it as an intrapersonal change transpiring when becoming an activist; for third trust was the difference between staying and "creating tension, removing yourself." In any case, trust was essential for the emergence of positions with unequal power like

speakers or negotiators: “The rest must simply trust what they see and know. Because, if you don’t trust, what are you doing with those people?” Trust made it possible for activists to “understand each other with a glance”; expedited decisions and made individual judgment look “the rightest thing in a situation,” with a generous allowance for mistakes.

A very important function of trust according to activists was to impregnate the more visible participants from the slander and insinuations of media and politicians. There were indeed media publications claiming that particular leaders had political agendas or material interests but these were largely ignored because activists “knew each other from the inside, had absolute trust.” On a less positive note, trust seemed to privilege known faces in the movement, especially (and admitted by) environmental activists with exposure in previous protests. In addition, later in the movement’s course newcomers could not be so easily integrated into the “working core” of old activists; they were expected to trust without questioning. The importance of trust was very clear in the cases when it was undermined. The conversations and conflicts between activists who had lost mutual trust abound with examples of personal judgment that was interpreted as usurpation, of feedback that was taken as harassing criticism, of proposals that were seen as a promotion of hidden agendas.

Tolerance was a norm that facilitated relationships between “very different” activists. The notion that participants came from very diverse backgrounds had a status of self-evident truth. In addition to the appeals to unity around the cause, many activists emphasized the need for “tolerance to all the others.” Sometimes it was the patience “to figure out what’s going on” in conflicts; or the awareness that “there are always many viewpoints, two at least”; or “the wisdom not to quarrel like a 15-year old.” As part of their notion of freedom within the movement,



tolerance was also the realization that “nobody owes you nothing in the group; they do what they can and you cannot demand anything more.”

Finally, under humility I subsume multiple descriptions from interviews of the learned necessity to “overcome one’s ego.” Activists saw “the ego,” “pride,” and “personal emotion” as “a major problem for the building of society,” a threat for collaboration and collective action. “When the ego comes out... it is the worst nemesis... there is no saving from that.” The ego “comes out” “when your idea is not accepted by others”; it makes you “go out of your league, out of the boundaries of what you are good at and into other people’s work”; it also creates “conflicts on personal basis” when “you take things personally.” In other words, activists saw “the ego” as hindering decision-making (especially on strategy), the pragmatic dividing of labor (and power), and the focusing “on the cause” instead of “emotions” and “arguments.” Activists “learned to control themselves in the course of the work”; the recipe was “not to take things personally, even if someone offends you, because it is not about you; the cause is above all; just swallow it.” People should “be aware that they are not here to get something; they need to give for the common good.” These widely-held beliefs were linked to very common individualistic attributions of the source of conflicts in the movement: “it’s all from the person.” As “everyone of us has an ego,” conflicts were “on a very personal basis.” People left the struggle “after interpersonal wrangles” because “not everyone could swallow their ego, pride.” Such explanations made conflicts and dropping out of the movement look “natural” and left out issues of power imbalances and of differences in meanings of democracy.

### **Democracy and Geography: The Sofia-Country Relationships**

The geographic dimension of democracy in the AFM merits its own description and discussion. The sections on power demonstrated that there were certain imbalances in decision-

making and policy-making power between Sofia and the rest of the country. But these imbalances were not there from the start of the movement. The stories of activists and the examination of movement records show that the AFM started in July-August 2011 virtually simultaneously in several places outside of Sofia. The problem was first raised in Novi Pazar, a small town where the first drills had been planned. Varna and Silistra, two bigger cities in the region, had organized groups first, and had the first leaflets out. The first formal initiative with elected representatives took place in Varna; the group sent official letters and statements to national institutions. Silistra (with Novi Pazar) started the first signatures drive for a petition (which turned out void) against the Chevron concession. The group from Burgas started the mass Facebook group, which was the first common forum at the national level.

In these summer months two processes were under way in Sofia: first-time protesters started flashmob events in front of institutions; the environmental organizations and networks started “a taskforce” and then a mailgroup of Green and affiliated activists in order to “concentrate an info base, capacity and people for this campaign... draw the first steps, to some extent a vision for the campaign... a parallel front with the purpose of not hijacking but building the basis for a future campaign, provide the information, the people.” Eventually the Sofia group would comprise these two flows of activists. Until the beginning of September 2011 the mass enthusiasm poured into loosely coordinated protests in many locations with some hints that Sofia and Varna were most organized and driving agendas. Then between September and November the Sofia group emerged as the clear leader of the AFM. A watershed event was the exclusion of representatives of the Varna group from the meeting with the Premier. It demonstrated both the power of the Sofia group and its legitimacy to influence outcomes. The event caused the leader from Varna to leave the movement; the Varna group was shaken and it took months to

reorganize. The Silistra group, a very strong collective based on an existing local citizen network, disbanded after their botched petition drive was severely criticized by Sofia and the local leaders were accused of “treachery.” The Plovdiv group, which was formed with the crucial help of a local Communist group, disintegrated after an intense conflict with Sofia around the place of politics and ideology in the movement (Communists and the Greens being the two warring sides). From the start of the national petition at the end of November it was a quite settled arrangement, a geographic division of labor, that Sofia would lead the campaign in terms of policy-making and strategy while the other groups would support it mostly with protests. A closed National Facebook group with over one hundred participants was the platform that ensured communication and deliberation on a national level.

The power of the Sofia group to represent the AFM and to shape policy outcomes was legitimized among the great majority of my interviewees with “natural” and pragmatic rationales. The Sofia group was close to the institutions and was more convenient for the media to contact. Activists in Varna and Shumen, for example, contrasted this proximity to the total disregard of their protest actions by the local and regional authorities (including regional offices of the national government). Also, Sofia was seen as a hub of “the civil society, the active people,” “the economically independent” whereas most local groups had to work in “depressed towns” where many people had “fear” of the authorities. And finally, the people from Sofia who had assumed power positions were supported because they delivered results, as discussed above. Similar to the understanding of individual freedom in the movement, local groups felt autonomous because they decided on the actions they would take (within the limits of their means) and they secured and controlled the meager resources for those actions. The national

Facebook group, with its mechanisms for discussion and expression of consent, was seen as providing the “glasnost,” accountability and vetting of proposals at a national level.

This balance of power was sometimes disrupted and the limits of acceptable leadership from Sofia revealed themselves. These were mostly situations where Sofia attempted to infringe on the local group’s autonomy. In some cases Sofia attempted to assign tasks to local groups, for example to attend a protest in Romania. In more heated confrontations, certain actions from Sofia were seen as “meddling in out internal work, the local level... without knowing the concrete situations here, without really seeing what we have done here.” In Varna, Plovdiv and Silistra there were activists who saw Sofia’s interference in their groups as uninformed, brash, and unfair. There was a clear contradiction to the movement’s ideals of freedom and of voice for the affected. While trust among activists lasted, many instances of interference were smoothed over as misunderstandings or eagerness for the cause. When trust was absent, “commanding” and “bossing” from Sofia led to conflicts and sometimes disintegration.

The analysis and comparison of diverse accounts of the Sofia-country relationships suggests more subtle power balances, and sources that go beyond geography. In the informal, ruleless environment of the national group network Sofia had other ways to influence local groups and common decisions. While decisions were made in the national group, most of the time they had been discussed and “consolidated” in the environmentalist network within the movement. Informal members of this network had built authority from previous protests. The environmentalists also “suggested” to local groups, based on their own experience, that leaderless organizations are more stable and invulnerable. For the environmentalists the movement was another campaign – a big one, but still one in a row. The campaign logic relied on expertise, planning, managing a media presence, and dividing tasks according to experience.

They called this part of the movement “an operations level” (vs. “the horizon”), “a core group,” “the rational model.” Most of the other participants, being first-time activists, thought in mass movement terms like spontaneity, equality, informality. In the beginning of the protests “the citizens” rejected the authority of environmental non-profits; environmentalists readily accepted a role of “instruments” participating “in personal quality.” However, in the informal and ruleless milieu of the AFM the pre-existing networks exerted influence in informal ways. Thus the Sofia-country relationship intersected with a preexisting vs. new activists dimension of power.

## **Discussion**

### **Influences on Movement Democracy Forms**

Democracy in the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria was shaped by diverse influences, some coming from activists’ experiences and meanings, some external, some reflected upon and some implicit. First, the visions of how the AFM should be organized were rooted in the understandings of activists about politics as usual, their experience with hierarchical organizations, and the AFM as an alternative. Movement democracy was about giving a voice to the affected, and not making decisions behind their backs; about empowering the people, the majority, and not a narrow interest group; about a direct participation in decisions and actions, and not fake representation; about fairness and meritocracy in the work, and not arbitrary or convoluted hierarchy; and finally, about personal freedom from coercion. Naturalness and pragmatism were the two main values for legitimating practices and new proposals within the movement. The understandings of movement democracy were supported by a strong experience of personal freedom and the elation of collective work without coercion.

Another shaping force for movement democracy was the influence of pre-existing activist groups and their experiences with previous protests. Most important in the AFM was the

environmentalist network – a cohesive group of non-profits, The Greens (a political party) and their sympathizers. This network was based in Sofia (but had members from other cities as well) and was hardened in protests since 2006. Roughly half of the local group in Plovdiv comprised of a small Communist group that staged protests on social issues in their city. The rest of the activists (which is the great majority) did not have experience with organized activism, and most were first-time activists. This fact is unsurprising given the absence of traditional organizing entities in Bulgaria such as unions or congregations. Instead of familiar organizational patterns, new activists brought in friendship as a relational base for their groups. Importantly, the experiences and habits of environmentalists were compatible with informal organizing – they were both leaderless, relied on volunteering, left space for individual self-expression, strived for consensual decision-making. The Communists, on the other hand, were seen as too formal, structured and hence “dictatorial.” The two understandings clashed in a conflict; Communists were eventually ousted partly because of their style of democracy.

Contextual demands influence movement democracy in important and sometimes controversial ways. In the case of the AFM, the interactions with institutions were the main imperative to adapt to. Institutions required representatives for negotiations, they preferred talks behind closed doors, and they were concentrated in Sofia. These characteristics introduced tension in the movement; pragmatism required the concentration of power in few activists. Urgency, stemming from the arbitrary manner of government by the Premier and from opponents’ actions, additionally granted power of personal judgment to negotiators. Finally, the highly sophisticated nature of the issue, with the necessity to build and use expertise, tended to concentrate important work in the hands of “a core.” With pragmatism favored over equality within the movement, the context imposed limitations on movement democracy.

The particular forms of democracy were also rationalized (sometimes post factum) by the benefits they afforded. First of all, activists appreciated the way informality boosted motivation for the highly prized active participation. People felt free to act as they saw fit, to engage in what excited them; they also felt an urge to take on tasks because there was nobody who officially was responsible. In the context of the movement, activists were glad about the unpredictability “multiple parallel strategies” meant for opponents, and about the invulnerability of leaderless groups from external pressure.

### **Evaluation of Movement Democracy**

Democracy in the AFM can be evaluated against democracy’s basic normative elements and on its own terms as well. Starting with the first lens, we can observe that power was not equally distributed in the AFM. Activists were aware and appreciative of power from, or freedom from coercion (Hollander & Offermann, 1990; Riger, 1993) within the movement; however, power to act and to shape the course of the movement was less reflected upon and relegated to the sphere of the “natural.” Power was either understated or explained with natural determinants, meaning immutable, pre-existing or external circumstances such as gender, “charisma,” prior experience, education, locality, or government and media familiarity. Coupled with the strong emphasis on action and interpellation, understatement and naturalization turned the distribution of power into division of labor. However, in this process externally determined inequalities – social and individual – were reproduced in the movement (Cohen, 1989). To some extent, the AFM exhibited features of a “tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman, 1973) where the deliberate refrainment from structures begets undemocratic practices based on personal and social inequalities.

Another important criterion of democracy is consent. In the AFM, consensus, or unanimous decisions, was much desired and most often reported in my interviews. Consensus is indeed a valued characteristic of movement democracy (Della Porta, 2009; Polletta, 2002). In the AFM though it often came as a product of the drive for unity; controversies were avoided and “extinguished”; discussions turned to concrete activities, away from strategy and ideology. There were no procedural rules to ensure equality (Cohen, 1989). Deliberation was purposefully non-structured, which privileged more confident voices, those that were ready to engage in “shouting matches” if needed. In this way, dissidence was onerous. In situations where voting was accepted (the Facebook decision-making), agreement was assumed, while disagreement had to be stated and justified. Leaders used such improvised polls to test the overall feeling of the group. There seems to be an implicit assumption that people make up their minds in advance, before deliberation (cf. political will formation); therefore a decision is withdrawn if enough people disagree, without further exploration of the sources of difference. Such notions were probably bolstered by the almost universal opinion that outside the AFM “we are very different – in terms of political views, life views, ages”. Consent was highly valued, but was not deeply probed.

Participation as a democracy criterion also had contradictory nuances in the AFM. First of all, the movement defined itself very broadly as representing “the people.” Local groups were indeed very inclusive and open to entry. The closed national group also had a quite porous boundary. The main filter for inclusion on all levels was the actions of the activist and the norm of self-sacrifice. Participation was very demanding. Exclusion that was rarely noticed was that of activists abroad, whose opinions were sometimes downplayed, and that of people without access to internet and Facebook – the main organizing platform. There were also higher barriers for participation of new activists after the consolidation of the groups and the division of labor and



power – there was no particular concern or procedure for newcomers and they had to figure out and accept the workings of the movement on their own.

One important outcome of movement democracy suggested by Polletta (2002) is experimentation with new forms of organizing and authority, or learning from movement practice. The AFM's focus on pragmatism hindered collective learning. Reflection on controversies was avoided; internal criticism was often seen as sabotage. In some cases an outcome was difficult to define and the activists who contributed to it had also the power to frame it as the sole witnesses. Additionally, the sense of historical force led activists to interpret even clear mistakes as the right thing to have happened: it confused the enemies, it drew attention, etc. Pragmatism also left little time for deliberate efforts to create an opportunity structure for activists ("the puzzle fits itself"), train or mentor new activists and grow new leaders (Maton, 2008; Speer & Hughey, 1995). Self-sacrifice had to compensate for the lack of concern for the individual development of activists. But in my estimation the biggest downside of the lack of experimentation and learning was on the group level – the movement was not able to produce formats that would keep activists together beyond the fracking issue. Efforts to mobilize around more controversial (e.g. social) issues post-AFM dissipated in the irreconcilable controversies among participants.

A critical evaluation has the benefits of retrospective and available social movement theory. But judged on its own criteria, the AFM provided a beneficial venue for democracy in several ways. It was a vehicle for citizen participation for thousands of people who engaged for the first time in a political action. It gave collective voice to the affected and provided a way for involvement in politics that was seen as legitimate and worthy by participants disgusted by politics as usual. At an individual level, the movement fostered a sense of freedom and

empowerment (Rappaport, 1987; Riger, 1993), which is a basic condition for future engagement in public life. On a negative note, the pragmatic imperative of movement democracy was not well served by the penchant for concentration of policy-making power and the avoidance of deeper deliberation. More voices and more participants in important roles might have prevented mistakes, produced better decisions and strategies (Polletta, 2002).

### **Differences and Dynamics of Democracy in the AFM**

The description of AFM democracy suggests that there were different democratic practices and arrangements across time and space. The movement started as spontaneous protests in many locations, structureless, without division of labor. This mass protest logic of action remained at the level of local groups outside of Sofia: there activists interacted in informal and familiar ways, interchanged roles and leaders, kept open for newcomers, took the time for self-shaping consensual decisions. But once direct interaction with government officials and institutions started, the movement as a whole adapted to the institutional logic of policy-making and then arrangements of concentrated power and less open decision-making emerged. From the policy-making phase of formulation of policy alternatives, the movement comprised two logics: mass protests and campaign; “the horizon” and “the operational”; “the crazies” and “the rational model.” For the environmentalist network protests and negotiations were two instruments of a campaign. But this arrangement roughly corresponded to the dialectics of the alternative prefigurative politics and the pragmatic imperatives of the issue. Key for the coexistence of these logics was the notion of naturalness (understood as factors extraneous to the activists’ control) and the legitimacy it gave to “the core.” An instrument mitigating for the division between core and mass was the national Facebook group. The dynamics between mass protest and campaign logics were most productive in the period between the acceptance of the movement into the

policy-making process and the voting of the moratorium in Parliament. This was a period of very intense mutual reinforcement of negotiations and protests. Once the moratorium was passed, four months of negotiations and lobbying followed when there was no apparent reason to protest and the movement actions were limited to meetings of committees and scuffles with opponent experts. For the local groups and the mass movement this period seemed more and more meaningless; there was no action they could undertake. Some groups wanted to move on with other issues; others sought guidance from Sofia on what to do with the energy that was stalled. The differences between the two logics became more evident and controversial.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusions from this study must be qualified with regard to several limitations. This study of grassroots democracy unfortunately excluded activists who did not participate in online organizing groups. It is an important question how (and if) their voice was included in “the civic society.” The study also could have been stronger if data on deliberation and collaboration were collected via participant observation; implicit norms and understandings are often detectable in the comparison between text and practice, reported and observed action. In terms of generalizability of findings and their comparison with other studies of movements, the conclusions should be applied to other contexts with caution. This study applied a conceptual framework derived from research in quite different political and social contexts; I attempted to balance emic and etic understandings. So findings should be compared with caution across the corresponding themes and variables in other movements.

The strengths of the study are grounded in its sources and foci. Data were collected from both retrospective, reconstructive accounts (the interviews) and contemporary unobtrusive sources (the discussions). The study was also successful in tapping the diversity of personal and

group perspectives of movement democracy; nuances, differences and controversies were explored and analyzed across individuals, locations, and activist groups. Dissident voices were included along with commonsensical beliefs within the AFM for a richer understanding. Diversity was also described across time, with the inclusion of analyses of the changes in SM democracy. The analytical framework allows for cross-national and cross-movement comparisons of grassroots democracy.

Summing up, the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria presents a case of grassroots democracy focused on a particular issue. As such, it was based on an ideal vision and prefigurative practice of a “civic society,” and it was also shaped by the demands of its context, where the issue had to be settled. Thus the democracy forms within the AFM were determined by multiple factors which were not always questioned, reflected upon, and navigated by activists; action was preferred over reflection. The movement democracy was participatory (and very demanding), direct, and pluralist in the sense of allowing competing actions. It provided thousands of first-time activists an experience of empowerment, was successful in its immediate goal, yet was unable to create new collective grassroots forms in a context that urgently needed them.

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## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

As we cast a spanning look at the three studies of the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria, we can ask again, why did it succeed? As with all successful challenges from below, many factors and circumstances came together to produce the desired policy outcome. Some of them were not examined at all in the study because that would require a new set of sources, methods and analyses. For example, the perspectives of politicians, government officials and fracking advocates could be captured to understand the motives and pressures for their actions. Or, a media analysis could trace the salience and valences of the issue of fracking in the public debate. But when we focus on the movement itself, the most salient characteristics we see are its flexibility and adaptability to the political environment. Indeed, although the investigation focused on the AFM and collected most of its data from movement sources, study one and two demonstrated the mutual shaping of structure and agency. The AFM's strategy and actions were also reactions to the government's actions and reactions (Alinsky, 1972). Where one tactic bumped into a block, another one flowed around, while sometimes the original idea was utilized for a different purpose. Meaning-making was also dialogical (Steinberg, 1999), reactive to cues and interpellations while assertively promoting the movement's versions of key notions and discourses.

Flexibility and adaptability, an accomplishment in themselves, were in turn grounded in the ability of the AFM to sustain and contain two different and sometimes controversial logics, or modi of action: an institutional one and a mass movement one. The AFM started as spontaneous protests in many unconnected locations, structureless, without division of labor and formal leaders. Activists cherished the informality, lack of firm boundaries between "we" and

bystanders, the freedom and equality of a leaderless initiative, the shifts in roles and responsibilities. Other versions of movement organization, such as the Communists' rule-based democracy, some professional participants' managerial suggestions, or "Occupy"-style deliberation, did not survive the prevalent notions and experiences of the activists. Contrasted to the mass movement modus was the institutional way of policy-making in Bulgaria: formal, exclusive, hierarchical, legitimated with expertise, and corrupt. The AFM, with its focus on policy-making, had to adapt to the exigencies of the institutional logic – to produce representatives, to delegate some important decisions to a closed circle of activists, to abide by institutional procedures and pacing, and to translate political demands into technocratic justifications. The adaptation of a SM to the demands of the political context are often a path to becoming more like your enemy, transforming a movement into a hierarchical organization (e.g. Andrews & Edwards, 2004; Clemens, 1996; Polletta, 2002). In the case of the AFM, the two logics were sustained dialectically past the initial phase, although not without conflict and exclusion. The mass movement was active and thriving at the local level, with protests and other mass actions organized autonomously. A more institutional logic was followed by "a core" in Sofia which negotiated with officials and politicians. The division of labor between "crazies," or "the horizon," and "the rational model," or "the operative," was admittedly crucial for the successful pressure on the institutions. These two logics were compatible within the movement thanks to the key understandings of pragmatism for the cause and naturalness. The latter meant that inequalities of power emerging from the adaptation to the institutional PMP were seen as extraneous, natural and legitimate. Also crucial was the trust accumulated within the mass movement modus where activists communicated extensively in person and from interchanging, informal role positions. If most activists saw the mass movement as *the* movement, a core of

environmentalists with experience in policy campaigns saw the protests as an instrument along with policy negotiation, lobbying and other institutional processes.

A remarkable accomplishment of the AFM was the extension of the mass movement modus and a more inclusive movement democracy to the policy-making phase of research on the issue; usually this phase is exclusive and centered around experts and expertise (Fischer, 2000). This achievement was facilitated by the rejection of experts within the movement as a facet of its egalitarian pathos; by the lack of experts on the novel issue (Callon [2005], cited in Eyal, [2010]), at least in Bulgaria; by the ready availability of US experience with fracking and science on it; and by the technological abilities granted by digital platforms, enabling crowdsourcing and structuring of information.

The dialectic integration of the two logics was exhausted after the first policy victory when the process turned to reformulation of the moratorium and the search for safe technologies in the parliamentary committee. Local groups and the mass of activists had nothing to protest; as they were not involved in the policy negotiations, their experience of (a) movement deteriorated. Protests as a form of solidarity, motivation, and link to “the people” were not supplanted by a commensurate action and the policy-making work of the “core” was not transformed into a mass movement form. Some activists gradually withdrew back to private lives; others demanded and moved to new causes, while for a third group the division of labor became problematic.

What was the movement’s impact beyond the policy outcome? As was discussed earlier, the AFM did not produce new grassroots democracy organizational forms; some local groups members remained in a loose network (I am a member of one) and sometimes would engage in local issues. Quite intriguing, and possibly impactful, is a change in many activists’ understanding of politics and the role of citizens in it. The AFM started as an issue-focused

movement but in 2012 and especially in 2013 many members, including the informal leaders, turned their attention from policy-making to politics writ large. This shift was due to the experiences in the AFM: the realization of the limitations of the state as an actor; the sense of discovered civic agency; the lessons from movement democracy as a policy-making alternative. The first change in activists' understandings was about their relationship with the government. At the start activists targeted the government as an actor to be persuaded to act; toward the end, activists thought of themselves as an alternative to the government. In the terms of political mediation, activists attempted to use direct institutional channels (without mediation), realized they were ignored, then used political and societal mediation, and finally came to the need for direct participation at a new level – not the afforded channels, but new and radical ones, with citizen participation that would supplant the government in many regards. These tendencies were observable in the clash of the two storylines (Paper Two), in the firm focus on policy formulations (and not just a negation of the government's decision), and in other movement actions, but most conspicuously in the demands for a new “direct democracy” from February 24, 2013. During this time the ruling party fell from power and the AFM, as a member of an ad hoc network of protest groups, saw an opportunity to promote “a restart” of the political system in Bulgaria. The demands were a motley list, but the AFM's articles were longest and most elaborated; they focused on institutionalized “civic control” over the government and on “participation of the citizens in governance” in ten concrete forms that would effectively mean a citizen-driven PMP.

Another important change was the emergence of a new understanding of democracy writ large, outside the movement. In the beginning of the AFM activists had a disdain for what democracy was in the politics of Bulgaria, and constructed their understandings and norms of

movement democracy in opposition to it. The experiences of practicing a democracy form within the movement that was pluralistic, competitive, direct and participatory shaped new ideas about a pluralistic democracy with a pre-made political will where “everyone defends their cause,” “everyone makes their choice first” and “cleans their house,” causes compete and should not be “sold” because everyone chooses theirs “with their heart.”

While these understandings emerged, unfortunately there were no new organizational forms to carry them. The two big gaps were for a form that would sustain mass activism without a threatening issue, where a mass movement could be able to work on a policy formulation; and for a form that would negotiate the boundaries between “we” and “the people” (blurred in the AFM), so that movements and groups with different causes could work together. Regretfully, for reasons related to external pressures and internal understandings, experimentation with and reflection on democracy forms were not in focus within the AFM.

Five years after its most active period, the contributions of the anti-fracking movement in Bulgaria to a more empowered civil society can be appreciated. It allowed thousands of people to step out of their private life and participate in a conflict about the public good. It also created networks and trust at local and national levels that still mobilize, albeit reactively, around environmental issues. The movement democratized expertise, allowed hundreds of activists to engage in knowledge creation, the use of science, and the navigation of arcane legal texts. At a broader scale, the AFM tore down the curtain of expertise that political decision-making uses to legitimize itself while excluding the affected. In doing so, the AFM demonstrated that politics can be shaped by citizens and how politicians can be pressed to act outside their habits and interests.

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