

“Never Again is Now” use of Cultural Frames in a Social Movement Organization

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Introduction

Never Again Action (NAA) is a Jewish social movement organization, whose goal is the abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and end of deportations in the United States. This ongoing research is a case study of NAA and specifically the cultural frames (Snow and Benford 1988) the organization is using to mobilize individuals into action. Initial research and findings point to use of a Holocaust frame which metaphorically connects the Holocaust to the current imprisonment and deportation of immigrants/migrants by ICE.

Research Questions

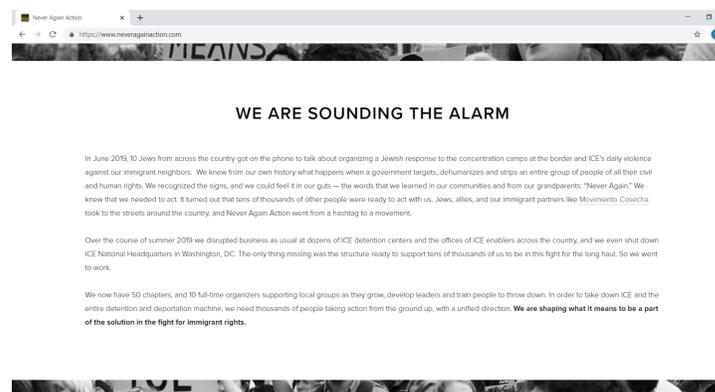
1. What are the motivating factors for individuals to join NAA?
2. How does NAA use cultural frames, specifically a Holocaust frame, to motivate individuals to join their organization?
3. How does NAA and individuals negotiate their roles as allies to a wider immigration rights movement?
4. How is NAA participating in social movement actions in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis?

Methods

I am using qualitative methods for this study including participant observation, interviews, and analysis of materials, specifically NAA's social media accounts. The COVID-19 crisis has forced this research as well as NAA's actions to be socially distanced, so in response I have observed online meetings and webinars. I interviewed individuals involved in NAA in Chicago. Finally, I have analyzed the Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook accounts of NAA (examples can be seen here).

Findings – Overview

This research is ongoing, however rich data points to interesting findings on use of specific cultural frames. All interview participants point to a historical and cultural precedence to engage in protest action, associated with their Jewish identity. Participants also positioned themselves as allies to a wider immigrant rights social movement, mentioning groups they work with, how they collaborate, and often raising voices of other organizations on NAA's social media accounts. Participants also elaborated on COVID-19 change as a way to focus on coalition building, training members of the organization, and adapted direct action.



Graphic from NAA website (retrieved 2/27/2021). NAA uses language throughout materials they produce, which points to a Holocaust frame. Ex: use of “concentration camps” to describe ICE detention centers.

Cultural Frames

From interviews and analysis of materials from NAA, this research suggests that NAA is actively engaging in a Holocaust Frame (Stein 1998) to motivate individuals, who most likely buy into a historical and cultural identity relating to the Holocaust. Interview respondents reported that the narratives around the Holocaust and individuals' stories helped motivate them to join NAA and was a way to create space for Jews in a wider immigration social movement. NAA also produces content that points to a direct connection between the Holocaust and Nazism and ICE, deportation, and current events, such as the capital insurrection of January 6th 2021.

Results

The data points to use of specific cultural frames, social movement action during COVID-19, and organizations that position themselves as allies. I found that NAA is actively using a Holocaust frame to help mobilize individuals and to frame their own social movement actions. Both individuals and the organization are activating this frame to engage Jewish individuals and as a motivation for their own engagement in this social movement organization. NAA also see themselves as allies and, as gleaned from interviews with leadership, this is very important to their own understanding of their organizing. Finally, NAA has adapted to COVID-19 and is still engaging in social movement actions. Specifically, they are moving away from direct action, involving large crowds, to building a stronger base and foundation for organizing.



1923: Hitler's failed coup

No real consequences
No fundamental changes

1933: Hitler takes power

15:09 · 1/7/21 · Twitter Web App

1,144 Retweets 54 Quote Tweets 2,812 Likes

Screenshot from NAA's Twitter (Posted 1/7/2021). NAA often links current events with that of the Holocaust and Nazism to create a metaphorical link. This example is after the capital insurrection of January 6th 2021 and NAA's campaign calling for the impeachment and conviction of President Trump for attempting a coup.

Further Research

This research deepens our understanding of social movement organizations' use of cultural frames. However, further research on use of a Holocaust frame by social movement organizations, specifically Jewish identified ones, is necessary. Finally, additional research on NAA could reveal more information, as this case study is limited in scope and other theories of social movement mobilization could be at play.



Screenshot from NAA's Facebook Page (Posted 1/18/2021). NAA often critiques ICE on its social media platforms, pointing out what NAA sees as hypocrisy. NAA also positions ICE as the target of their actions.

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