

Translating the Cheddar Revolution: Mobilization through the culture of fields in the Wisconsin Protests of 2011

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(Source: *MSNBC*)

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore why and how the Wisconsin protests of 2011—a series of demonstrations against a legislative bill with seemingly localized effects—garnered statewide, national and global support and involvement. I argue that in the protests against Governor Scott Walker’s Budget Repair Bill beginning in February of 2011, the range of participation of publics beyond the targeted group of unionized public workers in Wisconsin correlates with a series of discursive processes of interpretation and translation regarding the bill’s implications. That is, through employing cultural symbols and practices (or a toolkit) formed through processes in Wisconsin, American, and global strategic action fields (SAFs), actors in and beyond the immediately affected group made meaning of the bill and the protests, justified their participation, formed solidarities with, and helped mobilize others. Through the convergence of these fields and cultures the field of the Wisconsin protests emerged, in which actors encountered and acquired new cultural tools to be drawn from in other fields and social processes.

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INTRODUCTION

On Friday, 11 February 2011, the newly elected Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, introduced a piece of legislation he called the “Budget Repair Bill.”^{1,2} Proposing a list of measures—including an increase in public employee contributions to health insurance and pensions, limits and repeals to public worker union rights to collectively bargain, and the authorization for the state to reorganize funding to welfare programs without due process—the Governor reasoned that “Emergency measure is needed to balance the state budget and give government the tools to manage during economic crisis” (Governor Walker 2011). By the following Monday, however, a group of students and faculty from the University of Wisconsin-Madison infiltrated the state capitol building in Madison to deliver a Valentine’s Day message to the governor: “Don’t Break My ♥.”³ Joined later by members of various unions, the participants began to occupy the capitol building and its surrounding streets and a massive series of protests against the bill began to take shape. Labeled the “Cheddar Revolution” by the media, the movement grew to eventually involve hundreds of thousands of people across the state, nation, and globe, with protests occurring daily for more than four months, followed by a campaign to recall the governor.⁴

Preliminary research reveals that a relatively small number of individuals were

¹ Wisconsin Act 10.

² The background information and interpretation of events in this introduction are drawn from various newspaper articles, essays, and online coverage of the protests and the legislation (see: Governor Walker 2011; Chivvis 2011; B. Davis 2011; Dennis and Wallsten 2011; Glauber, Stein, and Marley 2011; Greenhouse 2011; Kaufman 2011; Krugman 2011; Levinson 2011; Nichols 2011*b*; Richmond 2011; Schaper 2011; Schneider 2011; Scipes 2011; D. Walker 2011; Weigel 2011; Ziff 2011) unless otherwise noted.

³ A few demonstrations had occurred on Saturday and Sunday at the University of Wisconsin (UW) Memorial Union, the Governor’s Mansion, and the Capitol (WKOW 2011; Derby 2011), however, the act by the UW-Madison Teaching Assistants Association and faculty is understood in several accounts as the triggering event for the massive protests.

⁴ The bill was passed 10 March 2011, after Republican legislators removed money-related measures, a move that incited more demonstrations and a number of lawsuits, claiming violation of Wisconsin’s open meetings law. However in June, the law was reinstated by a Supreme Court ruling and since then, the movement has refocused its efforts from preventing the bill passage to removing the governor from office, a political process that will culminate in the aforementioned recall election on 5 June, 2012 (Marley and D. Walker 2011; Barton 2011).

directly implicated economically and politically⁵ in the bill and did not fully comprise the protest population. According to recent census data, there are roughly 240,000 public workers in the state who encompass 4.2 percent of the total Wisconsin population.⁶ Subtract from these numbers the 19,000 “public safety” officials⁷ who were exempt from the legislation and the percentage of those affected directly becomes less than four percent. Nonetheless, these exempt employees, along with various other Wisconsin publics (students, the artistic community, local businesses, the Green Bay Packer football team, to name a few) declared their support and marched in solidarity with those impacted through the various stages of protest. Even a portion of the state government sided with the public unions when 14 state senators fled to Illinois to prevent passage of the bill.

The movement garnered support on a national level as well. Protests in solidarity with Wisconsin erupted shortly after in Arkansas, New York, Washington DC, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Idaho, Colorado, California and several more states. American celebrities like filmmaker Michael Moore and Rage Against the Machine’s Tom Morello turned up at the protests in Madison to rally the protestors, while other public figures voiced their support via Twitter. Even the White House, which often refrains from publically intervening in issues at the local level, joined in protest when President Obama voiced his opposition and used his political organization, Organizing for America, to lobby against the legislation.

At the global level, messages of solidarity were delivered from Europe and Asia, as well as Africa and the Middle East—where the “Arab Spring” was happening at the very same time. For example, during the first week of protest, a local pizza company started

⁵ That is, the bill’s effects would be most immediately and directly felt by the group of public employees, since they would have to contribute more money out-of-pocket toward their benefits and lose power in negotiating the terms, earnings, and benefits of their work beginning in the fall of 2011 and winter of 2012 (University of Wisconsin 2011).

⁶ U.S. Census data reports 239,029 public employees (U.S. Census Bureau 2010*b*) and population of 5,686,986 in Wisconsin (U.S. Census Bureau 2010*a*).

⁷ The description of the bill states, “Local law enforcement and fire employees, and state troopers and inspectors would be exempt from these changes” (Governor Walker 2011). U.S. Census data reports 15,073 Police protection employees and 4,223 Fire protection employees (U.S. Census Bureau 2010*b*).

collecting pizza donations to deliver to the protesters camped at the capitol. By 25 February, they had received donations from all 50 states and more than 20 countries. On one day alone, nearly 800 pizzas were delivered. On 27 February, in another act of solidarity, the international hacker-activist organization Anonymous staged a takedown of the Koch Industries website, a corporation backing the Governor's efforts (Anonymous 2011).

This sampling of events thus generates the question: why and how did a protest against a localized piece of legislation garner statewide, national, and global support? Jane Collins recent work, "Theorizing Wisconsin's 2011 protests: Community-based unionism confronts accumulation by dispossession" (2012), offers a solid basis for understanding the action of unions and some members of the Wisconsin community in these protests, however, I show how she leaves particular cultural dimensions of social action, the less organized events of mobilization, and my extended definition of protest participation to be examined. The aim of this thesis is to integrate her work, offering an explanation of the "ripple effects" (Acar, Grainger, Luft, et al 2011: 55) of response to a piece of legislation with seemingly localized repercussions.

In Chapter 1, I outline a theoretical framework that seeks to address the dimensions that Collins's work neglects, employing the notion of culture as a toolkit (Swidler 1986) to show how the symbols that actors used enabled them to ascribe meaning to the protests, a recent theorization of the concept of fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2011) to provide the contexts that shape those cultural tools, and a network theory of communicative processes (Mische 2003) that reveals how these cultural toolkits were used and led to connections between actors in the protests. Chapters 2 through 5 are focused on the empirical data I gathered during my fieldwork, during which I engage with these theories to analyze the discourse in my collected data, explaining how and why a legislative bill with seemingly localized effects garnered statewide, national and global support and involvement. In Chapter

6 and my conclusion, I show how examining culture explains the emergence of the Wisconsin protests, and some unexpected outcomes regarding cultural transmission and the effects of the protests on other social processes.

These chapters work together to argue that the case of the Cheddar Revolution exhibits the convergence of a set of social fields and their cultural schemas, an argument that can offer insight into the massive scope of participation. That is, through drawing from a collection of symbols and practices (or a toolkit) formed in Wisconsin, American, and the global strategic action fields (SAFs), actors in and beyond the immediately affected group made meaning of the Budget Repair Bill and protests, justified their participation, formed solidarities with, and helped mobilize others. The intersection of these actors, fields, and cultures consequently led to the emergence of a newly formed field—the Wisconsin protests space—in which actors were able to encounter and acquire new cultural tools, a process I suggest had a “ripple effect” on other fields and can provide insight into other social phenomena.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Much of the recent literature on social movements and protest has fostered theoretical explanations that either focus on the economic and political realities surrounding these collective actions or focus on ideological, identity, and discursive features. Most prominent on the political/economic side of the spectrum is the prominent political process model developed by Charles Perrow, Craig Jenkins, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow (Goodwin and Jasper 2003), which expanded the once popular “resource mobilization” theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977) that attributed social action to the acquisition of resources via social movement organizations and industries. This view perceives social movement activity to be an alternative means to accomplishing political goals, made possible by a confluence of structural mechanisms and “opportunities” such as political shifts within the state, resources, and social ties (Goodwin and Jasper 2003).

However, as McAdam himself (1994) has admitted, this approach ignores the culture of social movement action, a gap that the cultural turn in social movements literature of the last two decades has aimed to fill. Since then, scholars have been dissecting the various identities, emotions, and ideologies of actors who participate in collective action, at the center of which has been the highly popularized framing analysis perspective. Derived from Erving Goffman’s work (1974) on how individuals define reality relationally, this theory has been re-appropriated to explain mobilization, the project most notably spearheaded by scholars David Snow and Robert Benford (see Snow 2007 for example). Studies based on this theory most heavily focus on how actors and organizations within movements attempt to articulate goals, beliefs, and values (through discourse and media), to which actors align themselves and join in the movement (Snow 2007).

Concurrent with these theories, has been the rise of the “new social movements” model, with which scholars have argued that globalization and the emergence of post-

industrial societies have brought about new movements focused on the acquisition of rights and the improvement of welfare services for disenfranchised groups (Edelman 2001; Safa 1990; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Many of these studies have worked to solve the problem of culture in social movements, examining the various collective identities that in addition to economic and political processes, form part of these movements. One representative scholar in this subfield is Alain Touraine, who in his piece on the Solidarity movement in Poland (1980), argues that the movement coalesced around an intersection of class, national identity, and the goal of democratic rights.

Such debates in the literature, however, have reified the boundaries of culture, economy, and politics, with culture becoming relegated to subjective processes such as identity and ideology. According to critics, such a cultural approach, like that of framing analysis, eliminates the possibility of examining cultural dimensions of political and economic structures and ascribes an overly-agentic quality to culture (Polletta 1999; 1998; Williams 2004). Ann Mische (2003) has summarized these critiques, citing scholars that claim that framing analysis is “overly ideational,” “overly instrumentalist and strategic in conception,” and “retains a dichotomous understanding of culture and structure” (p. 279). That is, examining collective frames in social movements analysis generally suggests that individuals and organizations are actively trying to frame situations in a way that recruits others into the collective. Additionally, in its emphasis of the message, frame analysis does little to provide the milieu that makes the message meaningful, making it overly “ideational” and separating the work of culture (meaning-making) from the work of structure. According to Francesca Polletta (1999), culture should not be seen as the subjectivity of the agent, or group of agents, but rather as the “symbolic dimension of all structures, institutions, and practices (political, economic, educational, etc.)” (p. 66) that shapes agents’ actions.

In a similar argument, cultural sociologist Ann Swidler (1986) warns of ends-oriented approaches that tend to focus on goals and values as an explanation for action. Employing the example of poverty, Swidler critiques the Parsonian argument⁸ that poor people do not work to improve their situation because they do not share the same values as working and middle classes. Swidler debunks this, citing survey evidence that indicates that the values of the poor are relatively synonymous with those of working and middle classes. She offers an alternative explanation, suggesting that the problem does not derive from poor people not wanting or valuing the same things as others, but rather lack the tools—that is, the culture—for understanding and pursuing what may perhaps be more beneficial lines of action. Swidler argues that action is not directed by some end, as political process, framing analysis, and new social movement theory have all suggested, but rather is shaped by the collection of symbols, or the “toolkit,” that enables or constrains actors from perceiving certain lines of action as viable.

In a potential response to some of the critiques raised by Polletta, Mische and Swidler, there are a few scholars that have refocused the study of culture in social movements by examining its structural qualities and the more subtle and unintentional modes of action. For example, Padriac Kenney (2002) resituates Touraine’s study on the Solidarity movement, showing how in the late 1980s, activists in Poland satirized the formalized nature of these types of organizations, and the government that they “aped,” through “a revolution of style” (p. 157). Naomi Klein (2005) in her study of “culture jamming,” has examined work of guerilla artists who use and combine cultural images to resist processes of corporate power, at the same time also succumbing to these processes. These studies have traces of Michel de Certeau’s (1984) notion of “making do”: an explanation of how culture can allow the space for range of action within the constraints of everyday life. Similarly, Foucauldian scholars

⁸ Reinterpreting Max Weber, Parsons argued for values being the “switchmen of action” (Swidler 1986).

like James Scott (1990) and Ana Maria Alonso (1988) have examined how resistance arises through processes of interpretation of and discourse about the structures of power. These scholars highlight the subtle way in which culture shapes action, showing how through culture actors manage structural realities and interpret what it means “to be,” a process that just alone can bring about social change.

Jane Collins’s recent piece (2012), what in my research appears to be the first and only published academic theorization of action in the Wisconsin protests of 2011 thus far, is a work that situates itself in the realm of this literature. In the work, she reads Governor Walker’s move to introduce the bill and the responding protest action as operating in the context of the history of de-industrialization and growing importance of the service sector in Wisconsin and increasing austerity measures related to a corporatist agenda and neoliberal globalization processes of “accumulation by dispossession” (Collins 2012: 6). She argues that the “unusual...sheer number of people who were expressing support for unions” (Collins 2012: 6) may be explained by the emergence of a unionism through which the interests of labor were articulated as the interests of the Wisconsin community as a whole. In an effort to gain support, union members framed the measures in the bill as depriving citizens of rights and of services central to the livelihood of the Wisconsin community, with protesters coalescing around the notion that “‘we’ are all in this together” (Collins 2012: 17). While I agree with many aspects of Collins’s argument and believe it provides a solid basis for understanding action within these protests, I find particular theoretical and empirical issues in the work.

1.1 *The Role of Culture in Action*

Collins’s work (2012) relies on the assumption that actors in the protest together were “working to reclaim their lost rights and resources” (p. 18). In her description of the protests as a community-based union movement, actors joined in because they became aware of and

responded to a process of being dispossessed of benefits central to their own livelihood and the livelihood of their community. Like its political process, resource mobilization, and new social movement theory predecessors, Collins's theorization of the protests suggests that social movement action is ends-oriented, directed toward achieving some ultimate goal, a theorization that does not take into account actors who were not directly, or did not identify with the community being, dispossessed, but still were drawn to participate.

As I previously explained, Swidler's critique shows that it is not goals or wants that enable and constrain action, but the cultural tools that allow us to make sense of social situations and devise various paths accordingly, a notion that I employ in my analysis as being a more nuanced explanation for action. In her definition of culture as a toolkit for action, Swidler states that actors do not work step by step in purpose of some ultimate goal, but rather organize their actions into what she calls "strategies," where various paths are pursued according to the capacities and options of their cultural toolkit. This toolkit, or repertoire, is not a unified system but rather a set of differing and at times, contradictory, dispositions, stories, rituals, and symbols. Swidler (1986) argues that "all people know more culture than they use" (p. 277) and that culture plays varying of roles in action depending on its context. During unsettled times, like a political protest, culture becomes very visible because actors are looking for models in choosing certain paths of action.

Unfortunately, however, Swidler's piece suffers from a semantic overuse of terms that imply calculative action,⁹ a choice that undermines her theoretical argument. "Strategies," "configure," "organization," "models," "select" (Swidler 1986: 273-277)—often such words connote an intentionality to action that contradicts Swidler's critique of ends-oriented approaches. I would like to reorient Swidler's toolkit metaphor, away from the connotation of it as a "toolbox" from which actors instrumentally and purposefully select, and toward an

⁹ However, I sympathize with this overuse; as I found that in writing in this thesis, it is very difficult to refer to action without relying on such terms.

emphasis on it offering the “tools” for understanding, shaping how they perceive the world and the “moods and motivations” (1986: 284), as Swidler calls them, that leads them to make certain choices. This situates Swidler’s theory much closer to Kenney (2002), Klein (2005), and Certeau’s (1984) arguments: actors “make do” with a toolkit of culture that is both enabling and constraining. And, even when this toolkit is used to act in very intentional ways, such actions can still have unintended effects due the varied ways in which culture is deployed.

This theorization offers a way to explain the action of individuals who were not part of the community being dispossessed in the Wisconsin protests, showing that while they perhaps did not intend to reclaim anything, their toolkit made participating in the protests meaningful and a viable path to pursue. She also offers nuance to action that perhaps may have been directed toward attaining a goal. If we accept Collins’s argument that actors were working to reclaim rights and resources, which may be the case with public workers and the Wisconsin community, she still does not explain the processes that make those goods meaningful and worth reclaiming. That is, what are the “webs of significance” (Geertz 1973: 3) inscribed in these actions? Swidler (1986) offers an explanation, showing that it is through the toolkit that actors make sense of the world. As she describes, culture in her view consists of “the symbolic vehicles of meaning” (Swidler 1986: 273): dispositions, stories, rituals, ideologies, and symbols that offer models for action, making certain paths meaningful, and some meaningless.

1.2 *Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) for Examining Unorganized Actors*

A second issue that arises in Collins’s work is her extensive focus on actions of the unions through a perspective of frame analysis, an emphasis that overlooks participants who did not become involved through organized efforts. She states,

They [union members] framed Walker's Budget Repair Bill as a way to avoid the "ordinary run of things" at the bargaining table...They worked actively to frame the public debate and media coverage as about rights.... The presence of labor federations committed to a community-based labor movement and a dense network of grassroots groups have made possible a response...(Collins 2012: 13)

In the vein of resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977), Collins implies that formal organizations such as unions¹⁰ were the major cause of the mass participation that transpired, through their use of frames, an approach with overly agentic implications. Additionally, and similar to Touraine's approach to Solidarity (1980), she tries to explain how what could have been a narrowly-focused worker's movement gained the broader support of the Wisconsin community due to a triad of economic, political, and cultural factors (deindustrialization and globalization, cutting of state programs and rights, and the frame of this dispossession of the livelihood of the community). However, as scholars have argued, this reified understanding of economy, politics, and culture undercuts an examination of the processes through which these domains influence each other.

Instead of such a perspective, I opt for a newly theorized approach that works to avoid such problems. In the introduction to their argument for a theory of strategic action fields (SAFs),¹¹ Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2011), who are (respectively) scholars of organizational and social movement objects of study, state that sociologists, in subscribing to the paradigms of these particular research areas, "reify typological categories (i.e. social movements and organizations) that obscure a more fundamental and structural reality" (p. 2). In this spirit, they suggest moving beyond the units of analysis of "social movements, organizations, political parties, states, interest groups," which, they point out, tend to obscure

¹⁰ She extends this focus of organized actors when she attributes more organizations in her notes: "Not including unions and labor federations, more than 20 pre-existing community organizations of various types became actively engaged in organizing the protests, many linked through a newly formed network called 'We Are Wisconsin'" (Collins 2012: 18).

¹¹ In addition to their introductory journal article (Fligstein and McAdam 2011), this overview of SAF theory is also informed by an uncorrected chapter I read of their upcoming book, *A Theory of Fields* (2012), given to me by Jonah Stuart Brundage, one of Fligstein's research assistants (with his permission).

“the essential structure and nature of all strategic action” (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 22), offering their concept of strategic action fields as an alternative focus.

Fligstein and McAdam (2011) use an elegant metaphor to explain SAFs:

SAFs look a lot like Russian dolls: open up an SAF and it contains a number of other SAFs. So for example, an office in a firm can be an SAF. It is itself located in a larger structure within a firm, say a division. That division vies for resources in a firm structure. The firm interacts in a larger field with its competitors and challengers. They are embedded in an international division of labor. Each of these SAFs constitutes a meso-level social order and can be fruitfully analyzed from the perspective we outline here. (P. 3)

Broader and more fluid than the concept of organizations, SAFs have no clear legal or formalized boundaries. Rather actors and organizations come to designate themselves to social arenas and maneuver themselves based on the logic of “power and culture” (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 22) and the resources and schemas that are socially produced by those fields. Actors can move across SAFs, arrangements among and between SAFs can be made and re-organized, and SAFs themselves can be strengthened or destabilized through a range of interactive processes.

In addition to moving beyond the constraints of analyzing formalized organizations, SAF theory marries culture to its structural contexts (economy, the state, etc.), therefore ameliorating the issues that arise from Collins’s application of framing analysis and adding further nuance to Swidler’s conception of the role of culture in action. In summarizing her theory, Swidler (1986) contends that lines of action are strategized in relation to “the shape and organization” (p. 277) of a cultural repertoire, a vague claim that does not explain how the toolkit itself is formed and what activates the use of certain tools and not others. SAF theory offers a way to depict the shape and organization of these cultural repertoires by examining them in relation to the field in which they are created and reproduced. SAFs also imply the political side of cultural toolkits, allowing for an analysis of how actors operate in relation to what is at stake, the power hierarchy and the roles actors occupy, the “rules” (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 4), and how actors understand the position of others.

1.3 “Cross-Talk”: *Explaining the Movement of Action Within and Across Fields*

My final critique of Collins’s work is aimed at her neglect of forms of participation from actors beyond the Wisconsin geographic area. This may be due to Collins’s methodological choice of participant-observation and her use of concepts such as David Harvey’s “politics of living space” (Collins 2012: 17); however throughout much of the analysis she conflates the literal physical space of the demonstrations (Capitol Square in Madison and other places in Wisconsin) with the social space of the movement. She states, “The struggles against the ‘primitive accumulation’ measures of budget cuts and the ‘labor battle’ against restrictions on collective bargaining took place in a single political field—they shared a temporal, geographic and social space, and protagonists presented their case using a single rhetorical frame (Collins 2012: 15). However, as SAF theory acknowledges, actors who are associated distantly in either physical or social space can still be part of the same field, a view I would like to consider in understanding the field of the protests. Consistent with SAF theory, I suggest that we consider a field as comprised of those who articulate themselves as part of that field through any type of action, physical or discursive.

As Arjun Appadurai (1991) and Anna Tsing (2005) have argued, a global terrain and set of global connections have emerged with processes of globalization and the rise of new media. These developments have made the “images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere” (Appadurai 1991: 199) take “grip” (Tsing 2005: 1) in localized situations, making them a more material feature of social life and action. Similarly, Mark Granovetter (1973) has argued in his piece for the strength of “weak ties,” or connections that are not based on consistent interaction, intimacy, emotions, and/or reciprocal exchange, as a global connection may often be. He argues that such ties can be the bridges for the spreading of information and ideas because of the very reality that they exist outside of strongly tied social formations. That is, information that passes through strong ties is likely to remain circulating within the

same group of actors because of the routinized mutual exchange that conditions that interaction; it is the weak ties that provide the opportunity for information to be passed out of the group. In these frameworks then, connections between actors who are not tied strongly together by the intimacy, consistency, and reciprocal engagement often required in interactions in physical space are still a very important part of large-scale social process such as a massive protest. Thus, addressing the scale and scope of a social movement like the Wisconsin protests requires examining the processes of *translation* that connect actors from seemingly disparate fields.

One way to approach this task of examining translation is through the analysis of the practice of communication, a method that Ann Mische (2003) heavily advocates in her work on the concept of “Cross-Talk.” She states:

...we should shift our attention away from cultural forms such as ‘identities’ or ‘frames,’ toward the study of how these forms are shaped, deployed, and reformulated in conversation, as this unfolds across social movement forums over the course of movement development. Communication is a dynamic, fluid, interactive, and yet social structured phenomenon that composes relationships both within and across the multiple network formations that give form and life to social movements. (Mische 2003: 258-259)

Mische identifies four of what she calls “compartmentalizing” and “conflation” mechanisms, which are useful in illustrating the ways in which, through communication, actors establish and reproduce connections with each other. While Mische’s language suffers from the same semantic connotations of intentionality as Swidler’s (1986) with the use of such words as “deploy,” “reformulate,” and “compartmentalize,” I emphasize her theory’s use in understanding the how culture is activated and changed discursively, much in the vein of Foucauldian theorists like Alonso (1988) and Scott (1990). That is, Mische’s concepts offer an explanation for how exactly culture is drawn upon (either intentionally or unintentionally) and what happens after it is.

Employing this theory of cross-talk can reveal then, as Mische states, that “the effects of culture on collective action (and vice versa) are not simply a matter of language or

discourse as such, but rather of the interactive context in which discourse is enacted” (p. 263), an argument that is consistent with the theories of Swidler (1986) and Fligstein and McAdam (2011). That is, like in the concept of culture as a toolkit, Mische accounts for the variety of cultural forms that are used by individuals or groups in activating particular lines of action. She also elaborates on the “social skill” mentioned by Fligstein and McAdam (2011: 6-8)—how actors find connection both within an SAF and its broader field environment—by identifying and explaining the specific discursive mechanism through which actors form solidarities and explore meanings. Mische’s theory can then compensate for how actors, through the means of discourse, can make connections outside of geographic space, both within and beyond their own field, a feature that Collins’s work overlooks.

The task of this combination of theories then is three-fold: understanding action as related to cultural repertoires, the field environment in which those repertoires and thus action, are created, and the movement of participation and of culture through the interpretation and translation of culture among and across fields. Swidler’s theory shows how actions are not determined by ends, but by how an actor’s culture shapes his/her perception of the choices. The theory of strategic action fields, as proposed by Fligstein and McAdam, allow for examination of the environment in which those cultural toolkits, and the strategies of action they form, are embedded and how they are tied to economic and political processes in a given field. Mische’s theory of cross-talk provides insight into how culture is used by actors, and its movement between and among these strategic action fields.

Having summarized my theoretical approach, I would like to emphasize that I do not reject other social movement approaches such as Collin’s, nor do I wish to underplay the efforts of the organizations in the protests and suggest that this movement was simply unintentional and the result of only weak ties. As I learned in my interviews, the University of

Wisconsin Teaching Assistant Association and faculty, who initiated the protests with the first demonstration, had been planning to protest the Governor's policies weeks before the bill was introduced. Additionally, Collins's work brilliantly highlights the hard work of the unions, without which, as she claims, this massive series of protests, and the subsequent recall election, would not have happened. She offers detailed observations and a nuanced picture of such formalized efforts, and the political and economic context in which this movement operated, and I draw on this account as a legitimate source and perspective in the pages that follow. My aim only is to bring such research into a more integrative frame that further illuminates the logic of action in these protests, not only for formal organizations but also for those whose stake in the protests cannot be relegated to a dispossession of rights and resources and whose action is not situated in geographic space. I believe these actors and actions, and the fields in which they are embedded, can offer insight as to why these protests captured the public imagination so broadly and produced such emotional declarations of support or opposition, an aspect that I believe further fed into the scope and popularity of the movement, and buoyed the dedication and ongoing movement of unionized and more organized actors. I aim to build on Collins's work, using Swidler, Fligstein and McAdam, and Mische's theories to add to a more comprehensive understanding of these protests.

2. METHODOLOGY AND POSITION IN THE FIELD

I attended the demonstrations in and around the Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin on a chilly yet sunny Saturday afternoon in late February of 2011. As someone who did not feel directly affected by the legislation, even had previously questioned the efficacy of unions (though usually conceding on their importance and purpose), I would describe my position in the protests as a curious observer, fellow “Wisconsinite,” and opponent of Governor Walker’s policies and politics. The day that I attended, 19 February 2011, was the largest demonstration that had occurred at that point, reportedly of up to 80,000 protesters, including a few thousand from the Tea Party (Barden 2011). I remember the experience as one filled with Wisconsin pride, a sense of historicity, and puzzlement over the number of protesters of different ages and backgrounds. While I did not anticipate writing a thesis on this subject when I attended the protests, and did not take field notes at the time, the intuition and inspiration from this experience shaped my thesis topic selection and the subsequent research planning beginning in October of 2011, culminating in three phases of data collection and research.

The first phase in implementing this project included historical research and fieldwork planning that lasted more than six months. During this period, I perused newspaper articles, legislative documents, and photographs that documented the protests during the peak months of February and March. Additionally, as a sociology student taking classes at Central European University, I used the opportunity of my coursework to examine the protests through different angles. This culminated in writing a series of essays on various events and aspects of the protests: the *SolidARTity* artistic exhibition (an exhibit in March 2011 in Madison that featured the art of the protests), a documentary trailer entitled *Forward* that worked to commemorate the protests, the historical context of austerity and the Tea Party movement in the U.S., and an exploration of theories of class, gender, and social movements

in relation to my thesis topic. The historical research done in accordance with these essays and in the initial planning of my research informed further historical research, my selection of interviewees, and a theoretical approach to examining these protests. By the end of this phase, I had gained a sense of the story that was the Wisconsin protests: that is, the major themes, characters, plot developments, and settings to be further explored and elaborated upon with other methodologies.

In April of 2012, I returned to Wisconsin for a month of fieldwork consisting of interviews and some participant-observation of activities that commemorated the protests. Because my research question was about the breadth of participation, in selecting interview candidates, I aimed to get a range of individuals from various backgrounds, geographies, political affiliations, and organizations that claimed involvement in the protests. The interviewees, listed in Appendix A with detailed background information, included three females and nine males, ranging from the age of 19 to 85. The limitations of my budget, home base of Milwaukee, time, and contact information, made it difficult to arrange interviews with individuals residing outside of Wisconsin, however, I was able to interview one individual, Emma Smith (see Appendix A), who fit this criterion and supplemented the perspectives of those who participated remotely with their letters of support, editorials, signs, and other protest material found during my historical research. In a future elaboration of this project, I would aim to include interviews with more remote participants, to evaluate how their perspective and memory of the protests compares with those in the Wisconsin geographic area and further explore the factor of physical space in social movements.

The twelve interviews I conducted were an average of 35 to 40 minutes, in-person, recorded, and semi-structured in nature. My questions aimed to draw from respondents their memory of the protests, their justifications for involvement, the meaning the protests carried for them, any personal histories and encounters that they perceived to be relevant to their

participation, and reflections on the outcomes of both the protests and their own personal involvement (see Appendix B for sample interview guide). The semi-structured format allowed me to maintain some consistency with each interaction, as to recognize cultural patterns but also gave me room to ask questions that allowed me to explore the uniqueness of each person's "toolkit." If an interviewee had lapses and incoherence in their memories (which can be expected in interviews), I found that it was not problematic for my research but rather revealed the most meaningful aspects of the protests for them. In the first interview I tried photo solicitation, however, I found that the protest photos I selected carried more meaning for me personally than for the respondent, and thus abandoned this method, instead opting for questions about the media objects that were personal to the respondent. While admittedly I had a political stance regarding Governor Walker and the budget repair issue, my approach was not to judge the actions of the interviewees, or of other protest actors, but rather understand them, an intention I believe I made clear in every interview. I only offered my political views when it was directly asked of me (in an act of reciprocity and as not to misrepresent myself or mislead the respondent), and then did my best to refocus the questions in a way that kept the discussion on their perceptions and observations.

In addition to these interviews, my time in Wisconsin was spent attending activities related to the protests and in informal discussions with various community members. I attended the Wisconsin Film Festival, which featured a short film on the protests, a labor history conference, which worked to construct a memory of the protest events, and met with the curators and artists of SolidARTity, the exhibition of protest art that was launched in March 2011. I arrived at a time when many were gearing up for the recall election to take place in June, and thus, even discussions with my own family and friends often centered on political debate of the issues. The hot topic of the recall provoked many to reflect on the events of 2011 and make passionate claims, a milieu that added an interesting dimension and

perspective to my research, especially regarding outcomes of the protests. Often after these events, discussions, and interviews I wrote field notes on my observations and transcribed recorded material that I deemed to be relevant to my research question.

The final stage in my research was spent analyzing the various materials I collected through the method of discourse analysis. Having reviewed my collected data, I began to extract themes and develop codes to qualify different discursive claims. While I did not use any specialized computer program for coding, I modeled the process of discourse analysis on Atlas TI, highlighting particular words and sentences. I ordered these claims in relation to my theoretical framework, marking them with codes: references to Wisconsin, American, or global SAFs (WISREF, USREF, GLOBREF), translations of actions to other fields (TRANS), articulations of outcomes (OUT), among others. I created an inventory of my data in Microsoft Excel that tracked the codes that were in each piece of data, so that I could easily refer to them in my writing. The analysis of the data collected during my three phases of fieldwork—historical research, interviews/participant observation, and discourse analysis—inform my argument in the chapters that follow.

3. VIOLATING THE “RULES OF THE GAME”: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF STRATEGIC ACTION FIELDS

“This is a really horrible thing...the most radical assault,” “Nobody ever thought he would go this far,” “It was shocking...he went way overboard,” “I don’t think anybody realized it was going to go that far,” “They attacked people’s way of life,” “We’re used to certain things...we expect these things, and they’re under attack.”¹² In almost all my interviews, the reaction to Governor Walker’s actions was described as an attack, a disruption of a way of life and the normal run of “things,” as Dave Kreisman and Tony Castaneda said. In one moment in Collins’s work (2012), she emphasizes such a sentiment, describing the governor’s bill as “changing the rules of the game” (p. 13), a discussion that pervaded throughout the protests. These declarations can be read as the first hint of actors articulating fields in these protests. As Fligstein and McAdam (2011) explain, the boundaries of fields become pronounced situationally, when new issues, conflicts, and threats arise and seasoned actors in the field attempt to maintain stability through expressions that define the status quo. In describing such a violation of the rules, actors in these protests outlined what the field or the “game” was made of, what exactly were the rules, or, to use Swidler’s concept (1986), the collective cultural toolkit that allowed them navigate such a field.

In this chapter, I illustrate a typology of the collective cultural toolkits that underlie action in Wisconsin protests, organized by the three major strategic action fields resonant in my data: Wisconsin, America,¹³ and the global/international sphere. While, as Fligstein and McAdam argue (2011), SAFs are constantly shifting, and thus any interpretation of these fields will be incomplete and idealized, my aim is simply to establish a set of contexts relevant to these protests. As Swidler (1995) states about unsettled times: “when politics

¹² As stated in my interviews (respectively) with Brian Austin, Dave McClurg, Don White, Kelly Gilbert, Dave Kreisman and Tony Castaneda.

¹³ I use the term America in place of the official name, United States of America, due to the term’s frequent use when social actors work to define what the United States of America as a field is (both during the protests and outside of them). Catherine Cornbleth (2002) makes a similar justification in her study of youth’s understanding of the United States.

polarize and alliances are at stake, the public culture crystalizes” (p. 35), an argument that I use to propel this chapter. That is, through exploring the public or collective culture that becomes most visible during these protests, I believe I can offer insight into the prominent features of personalized cultural toolkits that shape individual action. Thus, I have attempted to capture particular dynamics, events, contentions, and actors—and the cultural toolkits that are formed through these SAFs’ processes—that eventually become “crystalized,” providing the grounding for action in the field of the Wisconsin protests.

3.1 *The Wisconsin Strategic Action Field*

As Tony told me in his interview, there is a particular Wisconsin “exceptionalism” that arises in discussions about the events of protests, Governor Walker, and the Budget Repair bill. In other words, protesters expressed the actions of the governor, and the work of his bill, as a move that could not be accepted in a place like Wisconsin (or one protest sign’s words, “Not in my Wisconsin!,” in Stopera 2011). In their historical interpretation of the protests, Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle (2011) summarize this ethic as “Wisconsinism,” to which the Governor’s move was seen as an “affront” (p. 2). Much of Wisconsinism—this cultural toolkit of beliefs, practices, stereotypes, stories, and rituals—is tied to the state’s political history, its agricultural and industrial heritage, and its geo-cultural placement in the Midwestern region of the United States.

Wisconsin has the peculiar political position of being a “swing state” in electoral politics. That is, many voters in the state identify as independents (instead of Democrat or Republican), making local and national elections contentious bids in which candidates from both Republican and Democratic parties try capture this sizable group of voters (Collins 2012). For instance, in the 2008 presidential election, the majority of the state went “blue,” electing President Obama, a result that was quickly turned around with the midterm elections

of 2010, when much of the state went “red” in congressional races and in the election of Governor Walker (Silver 2011; see Appendix C). While voters in the Milwaukee area, the largest city, and in Madison, the capitol, tend to have Democratic sympathies, aside from these locations there is no particular ideological stronghold of voters anywhere within the state (see Appendix C).

This political contradiction is expressed historically as well. Many claim Ripon, Wisconsin to be the birthplace of the Republican Party, to which contemporary Republicans have pilgrimaged (Wisconsin Historical Society 2012a; Saenz 2012). Additionally, Republican governor Tommy Thompson, who brought the “Conservative Revolution” to Wisconsin beginning in the 1980s, was the longest serving governor in the state to date and Joseph McCarthy, the leading investigator of “un-American activities” during the Cold War era, represented Wisconsin in the U.S. senate (Wisconsin Historical Society 2012b; Collins 2012). However, this heritage discourse is often overshadowed¹⁴ in celebrations of Wisconsin’s progressivism, most symbolically encapsulated in state’s motto “Forward” (see Figure 1 on p. 25) and images of “Fighting Bob” La Follette, the governor of the state in the early 1900s and head of the Progressive Party in the United States. La Follette and his party, supported heavily by Wisconsin workers and farmers, advocated clean government and the improvement of working conditions and public services and gave a voice to public higher education (Buhle and Buhle 2011; Buhle 2011).

This progressivism is further echoed by the Wisconsin’s reputation of strong public schools and universities as well as the role of the University of Wisconsin (UW), the capitol city of Madison, and Wisconsin workers as icons of protest and civic action (Acar, Grainger, Luft, et al 2011; Buhle 2011; Conniff 2011). The UW system, most particularly its leading

¹⁴ For example in an interview, Bill Manski, a Green Party candidate for the state assembly in 2010, stated “Clearly, Wisconsin has this dual personality, but I would argue that, over the long haul, looked at over years and generations, it’s been a consistent fact that the progressive side of Wisconsin’s personality has triumphed over the conservative side” (in Barrett 2011: 72).

university UW-Madison, has had a prominent reputation for civic participation. Faculty and administration have over the years worked to uphold La Follette's "Wisconsin Idea": a philosophy that "boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state" (Buhle 2011: 10) and that academic research should be aimed at improving the lives of citizens. Additionally, the city of Madison has been a hotbed for activism and civic action, with the UW Teaching Assistant Association being the oldest graduate student union in the United States and large numbers of UW students having protested in almost every decade's major political battle in U.S. since the 1900s (suffrage, civil rights, Vietnam, etc.) (Acar, Grainger, Luft et al 2011; Ozanne 1984; Cronon 2011; Buhle 2011; Kennedy and Null 2009). These political sentiments and values resonate in other "vehicles of meaning" (Swidler 1986: 273) in the Wisconsin strategic action field, related to the state's industrial and agricultural labor heritage.

While, as Collins (2012) writes in her work, the state has indeed undergone processes of de-industrialization in recent history and no longer has a large agricultural industry, images, traditions, and practices in reference to industry, farming, and labor are still celebrated. Wisconsin was the first state to introduce a comprehensive collective bargaining program in 1959, Workmen's Compensation in 1911, and Unemployment Insurance in 1934, made possible by its strong labor movement (made of industrial workers and farmers) in the early 20th century, a history that was commemorated by the enactment of Labor History in the Schools bill¹⁵ in 2009 (Gantz 2009). Additionally, the Green Bay Packers, originally formed and backed by those in a meat-packing company, remain idolized as the only community-owned team in the National Football League, backed by fans calling themselves "cheeseheads," in homage to Wisconsin's reputation as the "Dairy" state (Packers 2012). "Wisconsinites" also celebrate the founding of iconic beer industry corporations like Miller

¹⁵ Assembly Bill 172



Figure 1: Wisconsin State Flag (*Wikipedia.org*)

and Pabst in Milwaukee through brewery tours, festivals, and retro beer nights, practices that uphold their reputation as one of “drunkest states” in the U.S. (Fiegerman 2009).

In the early 2000s, a controversy arose regarding the construction of a massive “Blue Shirt” in Milwaukee, a proposed public art project, which many interpreted as being a nod to this industrial, or “blue-collar,” heritage. However, the execution of the project was eventually prevented through efforts led by none other than then-Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker (Anderson 2003; Schumacher 2001). This heritage, however, is still celebrated in symbols such as the Wisconsin state flag (see Figure 1), which illustrates a miner, a set of tools, and a cornucopia of farm products, underneath a banner reading “Forward.” Recently, at a press conference for President Obama in Milwaukee, a journalist mistook this flag as a flag for a union (misreading the year the state was established, 1848, to be a local union chapter number) to argue for Obama’s union bias, revealing the strong traces of worker “unionism” in the state’s symbols (Linkins 2012).

Another theme in the Wisconsin field, as referenced in the flag by the sailor (on the left in Figure 1), is related to the state's geographic association as a Midwestern state bordering one of the Great Lakes, Lake Michigan. This geographic placement connotes recreation and extreme weather, a meaning that is relayed through myths about the Packers' training in cold weather as an advantage in the game (Packers 2012) and activities such as skiing (snow and water). Every New Year's Day in celebration of the cold weather, Wisconsinites take the "polar-bear plunge"—a ritual where individuals set up tents, dress in costume, drink alcohol, and grill food in preparation for the ultimate activity of jumping into the freezing-cold waters of Lake Michigan (Sherman 2011). Such symbols and practices—in addition to Midwesterner tales about strangers approaching to discuss the weather and jokes about comfort food (beer-brats, Friday fish fry, cheese curds, mac and cheese, and of course, beer)—work to uphold the stereotype of Wisconsinites as a friendly yet gritty people with an "outgoing spirit" (Daniel 2011; Rommell 2008).

The cultural toolkit of symbols and practices related to labor, industry, progressivism and geography give definition to Wisconsin as a field, to which many actors in the protests situated and identified themselves. In February of 2011, just before the Budget Repair Bill was introduced, Wisconsinites rejoiced in their connections to the field, celebrating a Green Bay Packers' win in the Super Bowl, in which they took home the trophy named after the beloved sports icon, and Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi. Primed by stories that reaffirmed these symbols, the "shock" of the Budget Repair Bill, and the inspiring news of the Arab Spring, Wisconsinites geared up for a "Wisconsin Winter" (Hanna 2011).

3.2 The American Strategic Action Field

The SAF of Wisconsin fits within a larger geopolitical landscape, as a state within the United States, which, as such, is subject to a legal system that sometimes acts autonomously

from other states but always subordinately to the American federal government. In the case of the Budget Repair Bill, the legislation was in accordance with the state's political autonomy (not violating any federal laws) but was still situated within a broader set of histories, ideologies, practices, and contemporary debates in the American SAF. As UW graduate student Alex Hanna said in his interview, Walker was one of the first to make such "a drastic change," and what is happening in Wisconsin "sends a signal to the rest of the country." This country, the American SAF, consists of cultural schemas related to the founding of the nation, labor relations, neoliberalism, and the governmental system and political parties within the United States.

A central theme in the American field is similar to one observed and expressed by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* ([1835] 1994): equality and freedom as an underlying principle in all laws, traditions, habits, and morals of the American people. As he states, "The more I advanced in the study of American society, the more I perceived that this equality of condition is the fundamental fact from which all others seem to be derived and the central point to which all my observations constantly terminated" (Tocqueville [1835] 1994: 3). Tocqueville saw this culture to be deep-seated in America's unique history as one of the first colonies to achieve independence through democratic revolution, thus allowing for this "New World," a supposed clean slate, to be easily imprinted with the principles of freedom and equality (Tocqueville [1835] 1994: 13).

This ethic remains in contemporary American society, often uttered in the form of "American exceptionalism": the belief that the strong moral standards of "liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire" (Lipset 1996: 19) make the United States better than other countries. In Catherine Cornbleth's study (2002) on American high school students' knowledge about the United States, she found students emphasized similar images of America: "freedom including rights and opportunities," "better than other nations,

progress, and the American Dream,” and “diversity based on race, ethnicity, culture, and geography” (p. 519). Indeed, part of this “American Dream,” is the perception that anyone can succeed in America with hard work, regardless of their background, a belief that has made the United States the largest receiver of immigrants in the world, and upholds its image as the “melting pot” (Lipset 1996). And while freedom and equality do not necessarily always materialize in social relations, optimism for the “American Dream” still holds among the majority of Americans, even despite the recent economic downturn¹⁶ (Cornbleth 2002; Lipset 1996; Lasky 2011).

As such, many Americans appropriate the symbol of civil society, the philosophy of coming together for the common good, as the ultimate means for achieving progress in the field, despite debate over its actual extent. That is, although many have argued that the decline in voter turnout and civic participation, the state of the justice system, and the rising influence of special interests in government all point to the problematic status of civil society in the United States, such claims of reality do not prevent statements about protest (as a form of civic participation) being as “old as America” (Weidemann 2011:14) or scholar Don Eberly’s claim (2000) that:

...civil society is part and parcel of what America is. It may be the most indispensable characteristic of American society and of the American state. And it has played a central role in periodically bringing about renewal. Much of the most consequential social change in America was produced by the stirrings of concerned individuals joining together in association with others.
(P. 4)

Coming together, through voting, protest, organizing, and other forms of civic action, then, is the path to change, a narrative that is recalled through histories of the American revolution and Declaration of Independence, women’s suffrage, the civil rights movement, the protests against the Vietnam War, and the election of the first African American president, Barack Obama.

¹⁶ A recent Pew study found that 68 percent of Americans believe that they have already, or will achieve, the “American Dream” (Lasky 2011).

Indeed, many of these cultural schemas are most clearly seen in the contemporary political field in the United States. In 2004, in his address at the Democratic National Convention, an event that many argue as the starting point of his rise in the Democratic Party, Obama evoked such American cultural themes:

Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let's face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely....I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible....It is that fundamental belief...I am my brothers' keeper, I am my sisters' keeper—that makes this country work....It's what allows us to pursue our individual dreams, yet still come together as a single American family: 'E pluribus unum,' out of many, one. (Obama 2004)

Using the symbols of equality, pluralism, and civil society, Obama worked to inspire voters to come together in the name of the American Dream, a strategy that ultimately won him the presidency. Such politicking plays out consistently between the Democratic and Republican parties as well, when the common good and democratic fabric of the country are pitted against the public/private divide. Contemporary Republicans, inspired by the presidency of Reagan, the “citizen politician” (Gingrich and Gingrich 2011), have generally argued for the importance of a flourishing private sector, in the logic of “trickle down economics,”¹⁷ and a small public sector or government. Democrats, inspired by the public works programs under Franklin D. Roosevelt (Krugman 2008), argue for the importance of government spending and welfare programs. Both parties have taken these stances in symbolic defense of the public good and in service to the image of the “hard-working, average American.”

Underlying these symbols, and in tension with civil society and populism, however, is another American world-view, what has been called the “double-edged sword” (Lipset 1996) of American exceptionalism: individualism, competition, and non-interventionism. These views are reminiscent of Max Weber's narrative of the capitalist spirit ([1904] 1992), in which he reads modern, middle-class individuals in an “iron cage” (p. 181) of rational conduct

¹⁷ An economic theory popularized by Reagan that argues that low taxes for the business sector and wealthiest individuals will “trickle down” and benefit the poorest.

aimed at success and the accumulation of wealth.¹⁸ While such an imagining is most likely much more gloomy than what many Americans might admit to, such individualistic practices and the dream of “winning the game” (Lipset 1996: 147) are still prominent features of American life. This was made no more apparent than when in 2011’s various State of the Union addresses all three speakers, Paul Ryan (a Republican U.S. Representative of Wisconsin), Michele Bachmann (a Republican/Tea Party U.S. Representative of Minnesota), and President Obama articulated different visions of how America could remain competitive and prosperous. Ryan and Bachmann touted the need for lifting the intervening and stifling “taxes, penalties, mandates and fees” and stopping the “spending spree” of “big-spending politicians,” invoking the image of Americans winning against the “totalitarian aggressor” in World War II, in reference to an overly interventionist state.¹⁹ President Obama, on the other hand, called for America to “win the future” and remain competitive in the world through investment in public works programs, healthcare, and technological innovation. While the representatives from both parties offered different approaches, they used the symbols of prosperity and what “sets America apart as a nation” to motivate action and support.

However, despite Democrats’ invocation of populism and Franklin D. Roosevelt to argue for government spending and welfare programs, it is this symbol of the free, prosperous, exceptional American individual, unhampered by government, made particularly vivid through the presidency of Ronald Reagan (Lipset 1996), that has allowed neo-liberalism to dominate, and as a result, welfare services and the labor movement in the United States to

¹⁸ Parsons’s reading of Weber’s work is the argument that values determine action, an interpretation that Swidler (1986) problematizes with her critique of ends-oriented approaches. She argues that if we accept Weber’s theory, that the value of salvation, created by an idea (the Calvinist doctrine) influenced protestants into taking on an ascetic conduct that persists in the capitalist order, why did the ideas, and the values, change with capitalism? What still motivates ascetic behavior in capitalism if there is no longer the desire for salvation (as Weber argues)? Swidler suggests that it is not so much the ends to which action is directed that endures, but rather the ethic, the set of habits and skills that become articulated through practices and symbols, that guides such behavior. I use Weber’s description of rational conduct and the practice of individualistic pursuit with Swidler’s argument in mind, reading it as set of cultural models for action, not a persistent set of internalized values.

¹⁹The first two quotes are from Ryan (2011), the second two are from Bachmann (2011).

decline. Indeed, as Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss (2004) argue, this type of American exceptionalism has led to a stigmatization of the European welfare state²⁰ and idolization of the “new economy”²¹ and neo-liberal model: the American economic model (now also global) that masks “accumulation by dispossession” (Collins 2012)—corporate dominance, cheap labor, spending cuts, and the dismantling of unions—in the guise of innovation and prosperity. As Fantasia and Voss state (2004):

...the neoliberal social project...ultimately depends on the virtual disappearance of the Worker, *at a symbolic level*, along with the simultaneous symbolic elevation of the Consumer, who has emerged to become the supreme subject and object of economic practice. That is, the Worker (a social actor whose interests were once identifiable and recognizable in a range of institutional forms) has gradually ‘disappeared’ from the social imagination and has been replaced by the increasingly discernible figure of the Consumer (in whose name a host of traditional economic regulations have been methodically overturned). (P. 27)

Such a process has worked to increase the accumulation, comfort, and choices of the consumer, at the cost of workers’ rights.

In 2011, this cultural toolkit of American exceptionalism, pluralism, individualism and civil society became prevalent as a number of Republican governors throughout the United States worked to realize plans such as those implied in Ryan and Bachmann’s State of the Union addresses and the neoliberal project. Among measures aimed at cutting government spending, they introduced more than 100 bills that would affect unions and collective bargaining (Kaufman 2012). One of these was Governor Scott Walker’s Budget Repair, which in justifying, he pronounced, “Wisconsin is open for business” (Walker 2011).

3.3 The Global Strategic Action Field

The final field I seek to delineate is quite different from Wisconsin and America, in

²⁰ A stigma that has been made particular apparent in accusations that Obama is a “socialist” due to his continued sanctioning of public services in the United States (Scherer 2010).

²¹ The term “new economy” speaks most directly to the innovation in information technology that has created an economic model that relies on an industry of services, not manufacturing.

that it is not associated with statehood, but still retains a significant role in these fields' dynamics, making it another piece in the "Russian doll" (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 3) of the Wisconsin protests. In an echo of Tsing's argument (2005), protester and police officer Brian Austin said in an interview, "there are connections" between what was happening in Wisconsin and what happens globally. Indeed, the global field that emerged in the protests is most often articulated in relation to the contemporary processes ambiguously termed "globalization." Jonathan Inda and Renato Rosaldo (2002) offer a definition of this field, stating, "The general picture...is thus of an increasingly interconnected world. It is a world where borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous, allowing more and more peoples and cultures to be cast into immediate and intense contact with each other" (p. 2). The culture of this "interconnected world" has emerged from the spread of Western neo-liberalism and capitalism, the ideals of democracy, and new technologies (Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Tsing 2005).

While there are several debates over the mechanisms that gave rise to such developments and the origins of the phenomenon of globalization, there is some consensus that Western countries such as the United States have played a central role in carrying out these processes. That is, the capitalist model that emerged in Western countries in the 19th century has in the 20th and 21st centuries been appropriated throughout the globe, in what has been often been perceived as a totalizing process (Tsing 2005), or what noted Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamas once termed in my class with him, "a beautiful tumor." This has been accompanied by deregulation, free-trade agreements, and technology advancements in communications, consistent with the models of neo-liberalism and "new economy" as described by Fantasia and Voss (2004), which in addition to contributing to the wealth and transnationalism of corporations, has also brought about a form of "cultural imperialism" (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 12)—where goods, ideas and practices from Western

countries have been appropriated in the global south (Appadurai 1991; Tsing 2005; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). This movement of cultural goods and ideas is most clearly evidenced through appearance of food and fashion products and chains (McDonald's, Coca Cola, and Levis) from the U.S., and the popularity of Hollywood films all over the world (Inda and Rosaldo 2002).

Additionally, since the events of 1980s that concluded the Cold War era, the notion of the Western, liberal democracy as the ultimate governmental model has spurred narratives of social justice and freedom for all (Tsing 2005). A wave of transnational movements—in relation to gender, environment, sexuality, race, religion, and class—have appropriated the cause and the “language of universal rights” (Tsing 2005: 14), adopting humanity as a common factor among groups and communities and the tools of new internet technologies to work to implement social change (Tsing 2005; Juris 2008). One such example is the transnational movements against corporate globalization, a set of protest efforts that reveal the tensions, contradictions, and flows—what Tsing would call the “friction”—of globalization processes.²² Actors in these movements work to fight corporate power with the very tools that globalization offers: global connections, networks, and solidarity through internet communications and the concepts of egalitarianism, human rights justice, and democracy, an ethic that Jeffrey Juris (2005), in his description of such movements, summarizes with his slogan: “May the resistance be as transnational as capital!” (p. 199).

However, as anthropologists Appadurai (1991), Inda and Rosaldo (2002), and Tsing (2005) have all argued, the dynamics of this global field are not to be mistaken as set of unidirectional flows and homogenization of “West to the rest” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002: 25), where Western cultural tools are simply transplanted throughout the globe. As Inda and

²² Friction, to Tsing, is communicated in the events that enable and constrain globalization processes. She states (Tsing 2005: 6), “Friction makes global connection powerful and effective. Meanwhile, without even trying, friction gets in the way of the smooth operation of global power...Friction refuses the lie that global power is a well-oiled machine.”

Rosaldo state (2002), the movement of culture always involves “interpretation, translation, and customization on the part of the receiving subject” (p. 22), a process that allows for hybridization, creativity, and new forms of practice. For example, globalization has brought a range of international cuisines and foreign film to the West and digital technologies and the ease of travel and migration have enabled the artistic genres of world music (which combines musical forms, instruments, and languages) and street art and such practices as “Couchsurfing” to flourish (Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Juris 2005; Metz 2005; Couchsurfing 2011). Indeed, it is the emergence of this global landscape, made of connections across physical space and a “culture of hybridity” (Hall 1992), that has led many actors to engage in imagining an alternative world, a belief that is illustrated in the Couchsurfing slogan (2011) that urges individuals to “participate in creating a better world, one couch at a time.” As Appadurai (1991) argues, this “blurring” and the role of mass media, has incited “more persons in more parts of the world [to] consider a wider set of ‘possible’ lives than they ever did before” (p. 197).

In early 2011, this cultural toolkit of the global field—practices related to global power structures (imperialism, neo-liberal capitalism) and the narratives and images of human rights, inter-connectedness, and a world of possibilities—took on new relevance. On the cusp of the Wisconsin protests, actors in the field activated these images in support of a familiar cause. The dream of human rights, justice, and democracy had reached the Middle East and individuals, through the flows of the media, incited the global imagination and added a narrative to a toolkit that, along with those of Wisconsin and America, would take grip in the Wisconsin Protests.

In this chapter, I have outlined a set of strategic action fields—Wisconsin, American, and global—imagined by a range of actors (politicians, journalists, workers, theorists,

students, protesters, capitalists, etc. who might be partitioned endlessly into further SAFs) and the collective cultural toolkits from which they draw to navigate these fields. These rituals, stories, images, and practices are at times contradictory and always changing through process of interpretation; however, I have highlighted particular themes that come to be appropriated by actors in the Wisconsin protests field. In Figure 2, I have illustrated these fields and their commonly understood geopolitical relationship with each other. However, as has been suggested in this chapter, there are no static or continual boundaries in this field environment, and echoes, spillovers, and effects from other SAF cultural toolkits and action processes can be found in each field. Indeed, my intention in Chapters 4 through 6, as the dotted lines and arrows in Figure 2 suggest, is to show how through the appropriation and translation of culture, these boundaries shift, actors move, and a new field emerges, a process that offers an opportunity to reimagine this landscape.

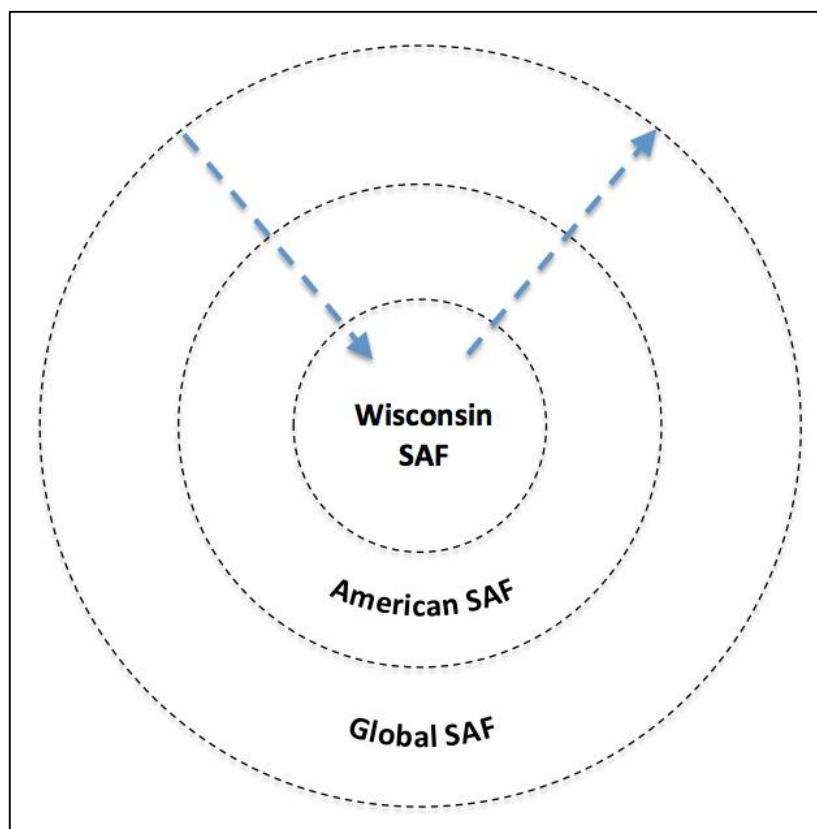


Figure 2: Wisconsin, American and global strategic action fields (SAFs) drawn according to their commonly-understood geopolitical relationship

4. THE ART OF MAKING MEANING: MOBILIZATION OF CULTURE AND ACTION WITHIN FIELDS

In this chapter, I illustrate how actors in the protest render symbols from the cultural toolkits of Wisconsin, American, and global SAFs to make sense of the bill and the protests, their position and relationships to others in the field, and the viable paths of action in each SAF and in the field of the protests. Using Mische's mechanisms of cross-talk (2003), identity qualifying and temporal cuing, actors draw from the cultural toolkits of their field to assign meaning to the protests and contemplate the possible courses of action. Through this process, I argue, they communicate common interests, alliances, and enemies, and choices, leading to a concerted mobilization of protesters against the bill and the governor in each field.

4.1 *Identity Qualifying: Recognition of the Conflict, Friends, and Enemies*

As Swidler argues (1986), during such unsettled times as protest, cultural toolkits become pronounced and clarified in a "contested cultural arena" because actors are looking for ways "to structure human communities" (p. 279-280). Mische's concept of identity qualifiers (2003: 13) illuminates how such cultural tools, in their use, become illustrative of loyalty to a group and create solidarity within a given social formation. In the case of the Wisconsin protests, actors from the Wisconsin, American, and global fields identity qualify through the enactment of particular discursive claims that deploy symbols of their respective fields.

4.1.1 *Standing with Wisconsin*

The protesters from the Wisconsin field, with the use of certain symbols, relayed the Wisconsin themes of labor, education, and progressivism to insinuate that everything "that makes Wisconsin great" (in D. Walker 2011) was at stake, and that those in the field should

unite against a common antagonist. Many accounts mentioned Wisconsin's role as the first state to introduce collective bargaining, a memory that Senator Fred Risser—the longest serving state senator in the United States who was in the legislature when it passed in 1959—recalled in his interview while describing his act of fleeing the state to prevent passage of the Budget Repair Bill. Additionally, protesters, in their signs and messages, argued that Wisconsin was “union country” or “union-made” and that Wisconsin's labor heritage was at stake (in Weidemann 2011; Kreisman 2012; Wisconsin Labor 2011). Employing these historical narratives, actors showed that to lose collective bargaining, a central resource for labor, was to lose a piece of Wisconsin history.

In extending this theme of labor, protesters referenced the workplace of farmers, cheese and beer makers, and the Green Bay Packers, another set of symbols with strong meanings for those in the field, to show how this bill was a broader attack on Wisconsin workers. On 12 March 2011, reportedly the largest demonstration day (Dane 101 2012), a parade of individuals dressed as cows arrived with the message “Solidarity” and farmers drove their tractors around the Capitol Square, demonstrating their coalition with the Wisconsin workers (see Figures 3 and 4 on the next page). In my interview with Mark Fraire, he expressed to me the connections he made with “rural” Wisconsinites, and in explaining the large numbers of protesters, he joked, “I know it's Wisconsin and we got a lot of beer...,” a schema that was repeated in such signs as “Wisconsin has a strong history of making beer and cheese not tea²³ and bullshit” (in Bad At Sports 2011), “I have nipples Scott, can you milk me?” (in Stopera 2011), and “Soli-dairy” (in Mad City Mike 2011). On 15 February 2011, members of the Green Bay Packers made an official statement in support of the protesters:

We know that it is teamwork on and off the field that makes the Packers and Wisconsin great. As a publicly owned team we wouldn't have been able to win the Super Bowl without the support of our fans...Wisconsin's long standing tradition of allowing public sector workers to have a voice on the job

²³ In reference to the recently formed faction in the Republican Party, the Tea Party.



Figure 3: Solidarity in the form of cows (*Dave Kreisman Photography*)



Figure 4: A tractorcade of farmers heading toward the Capitol (*PRWatch.org*)

has worked for the state since the 1930s....These public workers are Wisconsin's champions every single day... (in D. Walker 2011)

Rather reciprocally, the protesters expressed unity with their favorite football team, stating "Union workers won the Super Bowl" (in Stopera 2011), and "Aaron Rodgers [quarterback of the Packers] for Governor" (see Figure 5). On 22 February 2011, a rally was held in New York City where protesters donned the team's colors and cheesehead hats in a message of support (Fertik 2011).

The cultural tools of labor, unionism, and public institutions were further enacted through discourse that portrayed Wisconsin's progressive history and educators, another set of valuable laborers, as under attack. Indeed, among the first groups to begin protesting in the Capitol were the University of Wisconsin (UW) students and faculty, one of whom was the Teaching Assistant Association co-president Alex Hanna, who in his interview told me that one reason they responded was the "attack on public institutions" such as the UW. Dave

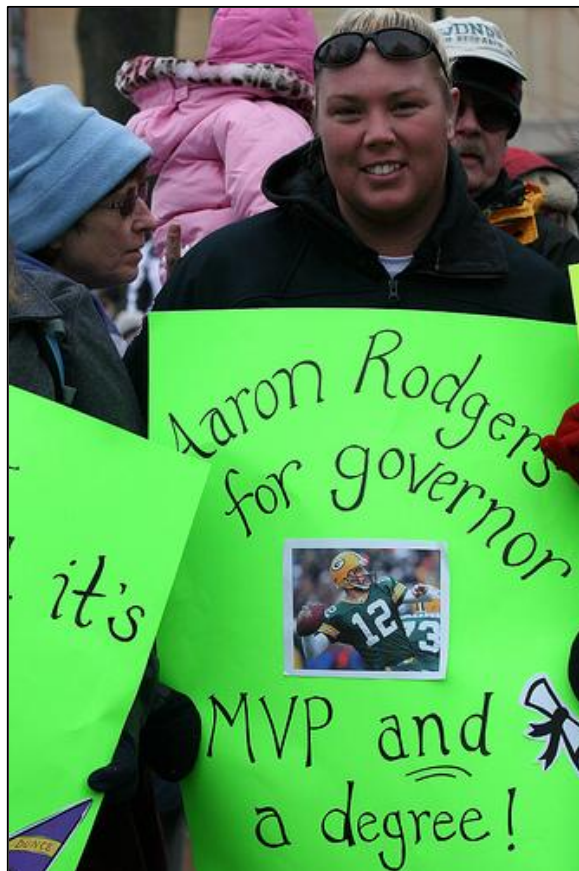


Figure 5: A fan campaigning for Green Bay Packer Aaron Rodgers for governor (Sue Peacock [Flickr.com])

McClurg and Don White both emphasized the importance of education to those in the state, with Don summarizing that people in Wisconsin have “compassion for a good public education... Wisconsin specifically has one of the best around and that’s just something people are proud of.” Support for this education could be seen in the gesture of the massive cohorts of protestors wearing red (the UW colors) and protest signs exhibiting claims like “Care about educators like they care for your child,” “Bucky doesn’t bust unions” and “Walker is a weasel, not a badger”²⁴ (in Stopera 2011). Similarly, UW historian Bill Cronon, in an editorial for the *New York Times*, argued for Wisconsin’s progressive history and clean government as the state’s “proudest traditions,” from which the bill was a “radical break” (Cronon 2011). Mark made a similar remark in his interview, telling me, “This is the clean government state...this is a state of progressive ideas.”

These meanings were also inscribed in the symbol of cold weather and the snow. One sign read “Snow and Ice won’t keep Wisconsin teachers away” (in Kreisman 2012) and a set of snowmen were built around the square, holding signs “Sno-lidarity” and “Wisconsin Educators: A voice for students and public schools” (in Los Angeles Times 2011). In journalist John Nichols’s recollection of events in a documentary on the protests (Forward-movie 2011), he recalled these images as an ideal expression of Wisconsinism:

Wisconsinites are proud of the fact that they go out and do things in the winter...that they don’t hunker down and disappear into their houses, they will go out in cold weather, in snow...Every Wisconsinite has a story of how they went to pick somebody up in the middle of a blizzard or they hiked across a lake in 20 below zero weather and so, I think the Governor made a huge mistake when he proposed these changes in February because that essentially dared masses of Wisconsinites to come out and stand for six, seven, eight, nine, ten hours a day in frigid weather and in the snow...and they did. They just kept coming in bigger numbers.

Recalling the narrative of the “outgoing spirit”—a reference Dave Kreisman also made, saying “Wisconsin has a very independent spirit”—Nichols suggested that participating in the Wisconsin protests was simply an act of being a Wisconsinite.

²⁴ Bucky is the UW mascot, a badger, which is also Wisconsin’s official state animal.

These claims articulated the meaningful relationships between public institutions, education, labor, progressivism, and the state, a re-imagining of the “Wisconsin idea” and a pact that was portrayed as being broken by Governor Walker. While distinctions of class and education might have otherwise posed a conflict—that is, through the often-theorized tension between educated intellectual “elites” and “blue-collar” cohorts—Wisconsinites found solidarity through the common thread of upholding this pact and made distinctions between the governor and themselves instead. Signs portrayed the governor as a “clueless,” uneducated, and corrupt politician, with statements like “Scotty doesn’t know” and others that frequently pointed to the Governor’s uncompleted undergraduate degree at Marquette University and his low GPA (also referenced through the distinction with Aaron Rodger’s educational background in Figure 5). Such a grouping of symbols identified a set of heroes and allies in the Wisconsin field (the Packers, workers, educators, students), most particularly the Wisconsinites themselves, and a common enemy (Governor Walker, the Republicans in the legislature). Through such identity qualifying, actors in the protest and those watching could make sense of what was going on, learning that to protest the bill meant to “Stand with Wisconsin.”²⁵

4.1.2 *E pluribus unum*

Actors from the American SAF identified the cultural schemas of democracy (civil society, equality, freedom), pluralism and multiculturalism, the American Dream and the disparity between wealthy Republicans and hard-working Americans, to coalesce around a common cause and enemy. Perhaps one of the most common slogans of the protest was “This is what democracy looks like,” a phrase that was referenced in two of my interviews as a very resonant theme of the protests. Don White, a former Republican, told me that this slogan really “stuck” with him, and Dave Kreisman, who tried to remain neutral as a photo journalist

²⁵ Common protest slogan (in Kreisman 2012).

in the protests, told me he would find himself tapping his foot to the beat of the slogan and “would get chills” in observing the protest scene. One woman drove from Missouri to Madison to participate in the “democratic process” (M. Davis 2011) and another interviewee, Emma Smith, told me she made the eighteen-hour drive from New York to Madison to support those public workers who, in her words “help build civil society” and because “[they were] attacking the very institutions that they told us built the country.” On 24 February 2011, a “Dance 4 Democracy” was planned in the occupied Capitol building, around the same time that protestors in the assembly room taped their mouths shut—signaling the lack of a democratic voice—and a protester dressed as Captain America, a comic book character whose mythos includes fighting for freedom in World War II, was spotted lurking in the halls (see Figure 6 and 7 on the next page).

As Representative Cory Mason stated, to many the protests meant “coming together, saying an injury to one is an injury to all” (in Forward-movie 2011), a pluralism that resonated in other symbolic acts. Mark, in his interview, described his actions in such a way: “I hugged, as a brown man in my 50s, men from rural America who were 75, white, farmers, police, ex-marines...people I would have never hugged in my life.” In occupying the Capitol building, protesters worked to reclaim a united voice in government constantly chanting “Whose house? Our House!”, with one protester even making a key with the engraved label “Our house” (in Weidemann 2011). Matthew Stolte, an artist who compiled a zine and set of collages on the protests, used notes that were found on the Capitol building floor, one of which included the famous line from the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” (in Stolte 2011). Several signs also referenced the speeches of Martin Luther King, recalling the memory of the Civil Rights Movement. Brian Austin, one of the policemen I interviewed, perceived his actions to be part of his job (to protect citizens) and in a speech on February 25 at the Capitol Building he



Figure 6: Protesting in silence in the assembly room (*Dave Kreisman Photography*)



Figure 7: "Real American Hero" Captain America in the Capitol building (@Gokunion [TheDailyWhat.com])



Figure 8: The death of the American dream (*BuzzFeed.com*)

summarized these narratives: “This is not a budget issue, this is a civil rights issue....let me tell you Mr. Walker, this is not your house, this is all our house!” (in Breckenridge 2011).

To actors in this field, then, the bill was seen to threaten these American ethics and Scott Walker and his Republican and corporate allies were blamed. In explaining their participation, two motorcyclists from South Dakota said they came to fight for a common purpose of creating a good life for their kids (in Weidemann 2011), a narrative of the American Dream that was also emphasized by Alex in my interview with him, when he stated that Walker was preventing the middle and working classes from having a “good standard of living.” In Figure 8, the protester has imagined this loss, showing Walker’s corporate greed has killed the American dream and Lady Liberty (the Statue of Liberty pictured crying), a message that was also relayed by signs that read, “Walker Works for the GOP=Greedy One Percent” “All Koch’d²⁶ Up” and “Saint Ronald Reagan: Thanks for the Lies! Trickle Down My Ass!” (in Stopera 2011). Tony Castaneda also called on this images in his interview, telling me, that the protesters were drawing a “line in the sand,” finally standing up to corporate greed and Wall Street. Deploying the toolkit of American culture, actors in this field identified the cause, the alliances, and the enemy in these events, coming together in what was perceived as a true expression of civil society, equality, and the American dream.

4.1.3 *We are everywhere*

Protesters acting in relation to the global field drew from the narrative of transnational corporate greed, the ideals of justice and human rights, and the images of hybridized cultural goods brought about by globalization to identify and express a connection among human beings all over the world. Indeed, one of the most prominent connections made was between the Wisconsin protests and the events in Egypt and the Middle East. Newspaper articles argued that the “spirit of Cairo” was in Wisconsin (Kroll 2011), a narrative emphasized by

²⁶ Koch Industries has financed Governor Walker’s campaign and political efforts (Krugman 2011).

Tony Castaneda when he said recalled thinking during the protest that “This looks like Tahrir Square.” Tony went on to add,

It was a people’s movement...democracy, and fighting against austerity measures...people [made] the connection between global corporatism and who the enemy really is...other people around the country, and especially globally made the connection between democracy uprising in the Middle East and what was going on in Wisconsin. Global connection was emphasized through universal rights.

This global solidarity was further emphasized when, around a week after the protests in Madison began, an image circulated on the internet of an Egyptian protester in Tahrir Square holding a sign in support of Wisconsin (see Figure 9).

Brian mentioned in his interview that this was an image that moved him and made him reflect that “the moral is no matter where in the world this is happening, people are fighting for rights and that connects us all in some ways.” Adam May, an Ian’s Pizza employee who collected pizza donations from all over the world during the protest, also observed this sentiment during his deliveries. In his interview with me he stated, “The idea



Figure 9: A protester in Egypt sends his support (*BuzzFeed.com*)

of people out there...really struck home with a lot of people, definitely brought a lot of tears to people's eyes...because it's like this worldwide crazy thing that's going on." This worldwide unity was echoed in a pizza box pictured on the Capitol floor, on which was written, "Thank you world, we are one" (in Kreisman 2012). While Alex, someone who had been a part of both social movements,²⁷ was skeptical of comparisons between the Egyptian and Cheddar revolutions, he still employed the language of universals (Tsing 2005) in the interview, saying that the Wisconsin protests were about "basic human rights.... fundamental rights," a reiteration of common protests slogan: "workers rights are human rights."

Drawing on a common language of corporate politics, human rights and connection, and popular cultural images, the protesters identified the stakes in the field and a global solidarity. The popular Vietnam War protest message, "The whole world is watching" (Buhle and Buhle 2011: 1) appeared on several signs, a narrative that suggested the Budget Repair Bill implicated the whole global field. Individuals dressed as characters from George Lucas's *Star Wars* film series, three of which are on the list of top-grossing films worldwide (Crothers 2010), became a constant group of protesters in the demonstrations, with Governor Walker often cast as the robotic "Imperial Walker," implying the influence of the Dark Side of corporate power on his politics (see Figure 10 on the next page). In April, drawing on symbols of the supernatural made popular by the recent *Twilight* and *Shaun of the Dead* trilogies, a demonstration was staged entirely by zombies (see Figure 11 on the next page) carrying signs like "I'd give an arm to see this bill die" and "Product of voodoo economics" (in Kreisman 2012). They, like others in the global field, articulated that this worldwide community should unite against another face of transnational corporate power (Governor Walker) that, in their view, was threatening their humanity everywhere (or in zombie-speak, eating their brain).

²⁷ Alex is a sociology PhD student studying the April 6th Movement, and now the Egyptian Revolution, for his dissertation. When news of the Egyptian protests broke, Alex flew to Cairo to observe.



Figure 10: The Imperial Walker (Dave Kreisman Photography)



Figure 11: Zombie demonstration on State Street in Madison (Dave Kreisman Photography)

4.2 *Temporal Cuing: Providing Guidelines for Action*

Swidler (1986) argues that during unsettled times, cultural tools come to directly shape action because they offer explicit and simple models and guidelines of how to act or as she states, “one unified answer to the question of how human beings should live” (p. 279). She suggests that the reason the Protestant ethic became so ingrained in individuals is because John Calvin so clearly and powerfully articulated the images of individualistic and austere conduct. In a similar vein, Mische (2003) defines the temporal cuing mechanism that actors use in discourse, as the articulation of short and long term visions—what she calls constructing “political time” (p. 271)—to connect with other actors in a formation. In the Wisconsin protests, actors deployed this mechanism by drawing from the cultural forms of their field to imagine guidelines for what should be done in the present moment, as well as plans for the future, a set of actions that illustrated the possible paths for those actors in the field confronting the protests.

4.2.1 *Forward not backward*

In the Wisconsin field, actors made clear that acting in the protest would save Wisconsin’s proud tradition of labor, strong education, and progressivism. Mark said that he thought that many people joined around “the same theme of building a better Wisconsin.” Protest signs powerfully conveyed the proper lines for action for this progress, stating “WWFBD [What would Fighting Bob do?],” “If you want to be a badger, just come along with me” (in Buhle and Buhle 2011), “Go Badgers” (in Bad at Sports 2011), and “Workers of Wisconsin Unite” (in Kreisman 2012). Throughout the demonstrations, the Forward statue, the figure of a woman pointing forward on the steps leading up to the Capitol building in Madison, was blinded, signaling that Wisconsin could not move forward until the bill was stopped (as Figure 12 and 13 on the next page emphasize). Following the bill’s passage on March 10th, signs appeared on the Capitol building and on the statue that stated “Wisconsin:



Figure 12: Blinded Forward statue (William DeShazer [*Chicago Tribune*])

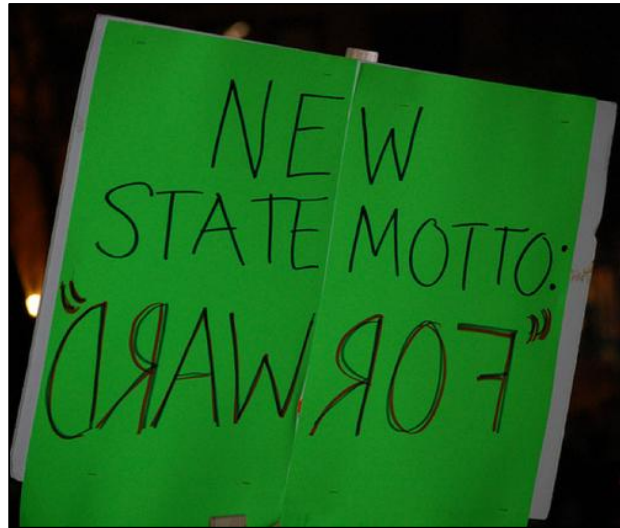


Figure 13: Protest sign (*BuzzFeed.com*)

Sold!” (in Kreisman 2012) and “RIP Wisconsin” (in Weidemann 2011) and indicated that the next step forward was a recall, as the sign in Figure 12 suggests.

Indeed, in addition to guiding actors in the Wisconsin field, narratives in the protests also envisioned a long-term plan aimed at ousting the governor. Signs like “Scotty’s Gotta Go!” and “More Cowbell less Walker” (in Stopera 2011); the parade of framers on tractors (in Kreisman 2012) suggesting that Walker and the Republicans were the “little legislators” who like vegetables would be taken up in the reaping; and Mark’s own sign made from a negligee with the words “Walker, your pink slip is coming” all illustrated this plan. Representative Cory Mason pondered this future (in *Forward-movie* 2011), stating “Is the epilogue to the story: this was the last great gasp of working people here in Wisconsin?.” Following the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision to uphold the passage of the bill in June 2011, actors in the Wisconsin field heeded this call to action, beginning a recall campaign to unseat Governor Walker.

4.2.2 *This land is our land, take it!*

Protesters also utilized symbols of the American field to motivate actors to participate in and support the protesters, conveying in their signs, “Save the American Dream,” “Democracy is Better in Person,” and “Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much!” (in Kreisman 2012). In my interview with Don, he stated that the protests were a means for people “who felt their leader was doing something wrong to have their voices heard,” which Onawa Powell, the student who led her classmates in walking out of Madison East High School, emphasized to me, describing the protests as a way to express unhappiness about “something the government is doing and fighting back, as the people.” Editorials in newspapers expressed that “those who believe in democracy should support the Wisconsin protesters” (Campbell 2011) and contemplated what Franklin D. Roosevelt would do, concluding that while he was against the unionization of government employees, would have ultimately changed his mind and supported the protests (Leonard 2011).

Imagining the long term, protesters extended the symbol of civil society to express that “This is what happens when nobody votes” (in Stopera 2011), a prognosis that Tony also articulated in his interview. Tony, along with others, implied that “winning the future” required being a more active citizen and Michael Moore (2011), in a similar tone, said in his speech, “Thank you, Wisconsin. You have made people realize this was our last best chance to grab the final thread of what was left of who we are as Americans.” Musician Tom Morello (2011) took this narrative for the future even further, writing in *Rolling Stone* in February:

The future of worker’s rights in this country will not be decided in the courts or in Congress, on talk radio or on Fox News. The future of worker’s rights in this country will be decided on the streets of a small Midwestern city, on the streets of Madison, Wisconsin. And who knows? Maybe in your city too. Yeah, this land is *our* land, and to those occupying the Capitol building tonight, or marching in the streets across the Midwest tomorrow, and to the people still deciding which side they’re on at this historic crossroads, I’d like

to pass along some advice from the immortal Woody Guthrie:²⁸ “Take it easy...but take it!”

Indeed, like many protesters in the American field, Morello promoted the Wisconsin protests as the first step to more civic action and equality in the United States, “the first stop in an American uprising” as journalist Sarah Van Gelder (2011) put it. This was also a hope that Collins relayed in an interview (in *Forward-movie* 2011), when she expressed that perhaps the “silver lining” in the protests was a revival of the labor movement in the United States. In repetition of these projects for equality, Dave McClurg hoped for “a more humane policy and politics in the U.S.” or “at the very least an indictment on corporate politics.” One sign summarized these long-term dreams, stating, “Let’s build a U.S. for all of Us” (in Figure 14).

4.2.3 Making a better world

Actors in the international SAF, through the action of supporting the Wisconsin protests, globalized the narrative of indicting corporate politics and extended the vision of



Figure 14: A number of American dreams expressed in the Capitol rotunda (Dave Kreisman Photography)

²⁸ Woody Guthrie wrote one of the most popular folk songs about America, “This Land is Your Land.”

creating a better America, to creating a better world. In a pun on Morello's band name (Rage Against the Machine), one protest sign stated, "Rage against the corporate machine" (in Kreisman 2012), a cue that the international organization Anonymous enacted when they crashed the Koch industries website and gave a list of corporate products that should be boycotted in support of Wisconsin (Anonymous 2011). Drawing from Quentin Tarantino's internationally popular hybrid of cultural genres, *Kill Bill* (Crothers 2010), many signs called for help to "Kill the bill" and *Star Wars* reappeared in signs that read "Stop the Imperial Walker" and "Stop Darth Walker" (in Stopera 2011). These messages, along with the doubly referenced "Walk Like an Egyptian" (in Stopera 2011 in reference to a popular 80s song by the Bangles and the Egyptian Revolution), signaled that protesters should join in the fight against a global oppressor.

In late February, more support arrived from Egypt, with union leader Kamal Abbas sending a message to Wisconsin protesters: "We want you to know that we stand on your side. Stand firm and don't waiver. Don't give up on your rights." (Kroll 2011). When Morello flew in to Madison for a rally concert, he relayed another message from a protester in Egypt, "We wish you could see firsthand the change we have made here...The beauty in Tahrir Square you can have everywhere, on any corner, in your city, or in your heart. So hold on tightly and don't let go, and breathe deep Wisconsin!...because justice is in the air!" (in Morello 2011). Inspired by this "international interconnectedness," two Wisconsin expatriates living in Turkey began a project of collecting postcards of support that they would deliver to Tahrir Square in Cairo, in an effort "to support others who struggle against power" and express the dream of freedom for all (Ciaccio 2011). Appropriating these narratives, Morello (in Forward-movie 2011) appeared once again in the global field, projecting a similar dream: "What I saw on the streets of Madison was a vision....It seemed like anything was possible...that it could be about much more than stopping one bad law, much more than

ousting one bad governor.” By cuing to present and future through these symbols, global actors showed how acting in the Wisconsin protests could help realize a more long term, global vision of creating a better world.

Using these temporal cuing and identity qualifying mechanisms, actors in the Wisconsin, American and Wisconsin SAFs, articulated a set of stakes, solidarities, and paths of action in a way that made sense to other actors in the field. That is, they explored, and at the same time illustrated, what the implications of the bill, the position of others, and the viable choices in action were using common narratives, images, and practices of each field. Through these discursive processes, these actors recognized that what Governor Walker and his partners were doing was a threat to the cohesion, stability, welfare of those in Wisconsin, America, and the world, and sensed that to act in the Wisconsin protests, could bring a better future for everyone.

5. MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OR LOST IN TRANSLATION? BRIDGES AND LAPSES IN THE FIELD ENVIRONMENT

In the previous chapter, I illustrated how actors make the protest meaningful to others in their field, a process of translating and interpretation in itself that accounts for connections made and particular social movement patterns within the field of the protests. However, as argued in SAF theory, actors can belong to more than one field and during unsettled situations, like the protest events, “skilled social actors” help to “translate existing rules”²⁹ (Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 11), and find ways of cooperating with other groups. Thus, using Mische’s concepts of generality shifting and multiple targeting, I now show how actors shift from field to field and forge connections between fields. Through these mechanisms, cultural symbols become appropriated, combined, and muddled to produce a translation of common meaning, explaining the movement and “ripple effect” of culture, and thus action, to other fields. However, translation is not always an easy flow, as Tsing (2005) says about friction, and exchange between actors does not necessarily result in mutual understanding. In the second section of this chapter, then, I touch on the more “deviant” modes of cultural appropriation in these protests, and how actors employ symbols from their fields to differentiate and contest meanings and action.

5.1 *Generality Shifting and Multiple Targeting: Cross-Talking with Other Fields*

While significance was ascribed to the Wisconsin protests through the mechanisms of identity qualifying and temporal cuing—with recognizable symbols being employed from each field in a way that motivated actors in that field to join in solidarity—alliances, enemies, and stakes were identified and guidelines for action were cued *across* fields through generality shifting and multiple targeting. In generality shifting, actors fold individuals,

²⁹ “Rules” in this context can be understood as a cultural toolkit.

issues, and stakes into broader categories, thus concerning more actors. Similarly, through multiple targeting, actors layer symbols that have several associations, “conflating [the] different possible discursive meanings” so that many varieties of spectators might be called to join (Mische 2003: 272). In the Wisconsin protests, actors amalgamated particular symbols and used ambiguous and broad categories through such discursive acts, and thus translated the stakes, the players, and the possible courses of action to broader fields, inciting people from other fields to join in the protest.

Many protesters used such mechanisms in statements that illustrated that the bill was about much more than collective bargaining and public services for Wisconsinites and that it addressed and included many more than those directly implied. In their press release regarding their act of protests, the Anonymous group (2011) made the following statement:

Anonymous cannot ignore the plight of the citizen-workers of Wisconsin, or the opportunity to fight for the people in America’s broken political system. For these reasons, we feel that the Koch brothers threaten the United States democratic system and, by extension, all freedom-loving individuals everywhere.

Combining the symbols of the Wisconsin unionism, American democracy, global justice and freedom, the group implicated actors from multiple fields in the cause. This message was also relayed in Matthew Stolte’s collage about the protests (see Figure 15 on the next page). In this painting he entangles the slogan “the whole world is watching” with the geographic outline of Wisconsin, the word “earth,” and the messages “Kill the Bill,” “This is what democracy looks like!,” and the “Peasants are revolting!” (at the bottom). Combining symbols that have connotations in Wisconsin, American, and global SAFs Stolte expressed the common causes and interests in these events, along with slogans like “Democracy Wisconsin Style” (in Fantz 2011) and Paul Krugman’s comment (2011) that “What Mr. Walker and his backers are trying to do is to make Wisconsin — and eventually, America — less of a functioning democracy and more of a third-world-style oligarchy.”



Figure 15: Matthew Stolte's work of translation (Sarah Stolte [*Project Lodge*])



Figure 16: Mike Konapacki's re-imagining of the Wisconsin flag (Sarae [*Flickr.com*])

In a similar vein, Mike Konapacki (pictured on the right in Figure 16), a labor cartoonist, revised the Wisconsin flag (in Figure 16) to express what the protests were about through numerous symbols,³⁰ changing the miner and sailors to have raised fists and including the phrases “Rebellion to Tyrants” (a phrase proposed by Benjamin Franklin for the U.S. seal) and “Democracy for workers.” Through this rendering, actors from the Wisconsin, American, or global fields could find a way to identify with the struggle of the protests, finding meaning in the Wisconsin symbols of labor and progressivism, or in the two phrases that either recall an American narrative of democratic freedom or a global dream of fighting capitalist oppression. In another unique combination of mechanisms, Michael Moore (2011) drew on the narratives from several fields using various levels of generality to show the flaws of the bill’s justification: “The nation is not broke, my friends. Wisconsin is not broke. Saying that the country is broke is repeating a Big Lie. It’s one of the three biggest lies of the decade: 1) America is broke, 2) Iraq has WMD, and 3) The Packers can’t win the Super Bowl without Brett Favre.” Moore cued several narratives to translate the situation into a new meaning with which actors from several fields could identify, shifting the “lie” of the bill onto the same plane as the “biggest lies” in Wisconsin (can’t win the Super Bowl), America (broke), and the world (weapons of mass destruction in Iraq).

In addition to articulating the common meanings, actors employed such conflation methods to illustrate where alliances and enemies could be made. Actors shifted from descriptions of more particular communities to broader communities, stating, “We are all Wisconsin. We are all Americans” (Nichols 2011a: 17), “Worker’s Rights are Human Rights” (in Stopera 2011), and “I’m from Wisconsin. What planet is Walker from?” (in Nichols 2011a: 17) and likened Walker to the then already globalized dictators of the Middle East, with signs like “Mubarak for Governor” (in Stopera 2012) and “Scott Gadaffi” (in

³⁰ Konapacki described this piece at the Wisconsin Labor History Society conference I attended in April 2012.



Figure 17: The Wisconsin Fist of Solidarity (Time)



Figure 18: Instructions for healing the world (Eric Thayer [USNews.com])

Kreisman 2012). Through such tactics, protesters communicated that actors from various SAFs should unite to become one against a common enemy, an idea that is further visualized by the artist who conceived the image in Figure 17. In this image, he superimposes the geographic outline of Wisconsin on the solidarity fist (“the universal symbol of solidarity and support” –Gibson 2011), illustrating that the boundaries of the Wisconsin community are actually a global community of fighters everywhere, or in other words “we are all Wisconsin.” This image went viral online when many Facebook users uploaded it as their profile pictures (as did I during the time of the protests), in a message of support (Gibson 2011).

Much like temporal cuing, these conflation mechanisms also translated possible lines of action to be pursued. In the short-term, a clearly articulated pursuit was to support the protesters in Wisconsin in any way possible. Drawing on the many meanings of labor, human rights, inequality, and capitalism and the new economy, musician Tom Morello (2011) stated,

The battle to preserve workers’ rights in Wisconsin is a watershed moment in US history. Wisconsin is Class War Ground Zero for the new millennium and a crucible for people’s rights in the United States. As the gulf between the haves and have-nots grows exponentially in the US it is here that the first domino is going to fall...one way or the other.

Morello portrayed Wisconsin as an emergency zone or “Ground Zero” that suggested a call for help from individuals in many fields, one also articulated by the woman who taped across

her mouth “Save Wisco, Heal the World” in Figure 18. Through this action, which invokes the symbols of democracy and the dream for a better world, she insinuates that the first step in removing the tape and gaining back the human right to speak is to take action in the Wisconsin protests. Anonymous’s boycott of goods, posting an image like that in Figure 17 on Facebook, or sending a message through internet and mainstream media provided the models by which those from afar could do so.

Along with these methods, one of the most common practices for sending support was through the local Madison pizza company Ian’s, a company that, in many ways, became an ambassador and translator of culture and action throughout the protests. As Adam May expressed in his interview, the pizza company prior to the protests was a “Madison staple,” a “comfort food” joint with strong connections and associations with the Midwest. However, the art of making pizza in this particular business is an act of cultural jamming itself, as the pizza-makers take the now globalized food product of pizza, or what one employee described as “an everyman food” (in Weidemann 2011: 114) and place items like mac n’ cheese, taco fillings, and steak and fries (symbols of Midwestern and American cuisine). In the first week of protests, following an order from the mother of a UW student camped in the Capitol building, the company received a flurry of calls ordering pizza for the protesters. Soon, pizzas were coming in from all around the world,³¹ provoking such exclamations as “Democracy Runs on Ian’s” (on the Ian’s Pizza Facebook page), “This is what democracy tastes like,” and “This is the pizza rebellion” (in Figure 19 on the next page and in Weidemann 2011: 113-114). Ian’s became a tool for translation: an expression of what the protests meant and a means for those from other fields to send their support.

In addition to these short-term demonstrations of action, protesters combined symbols to express a bigger vision for action in the Wisconsin protests. In envisioning the

³¹ Donating states and countries are listed in the chalkboard image in Figure 19.

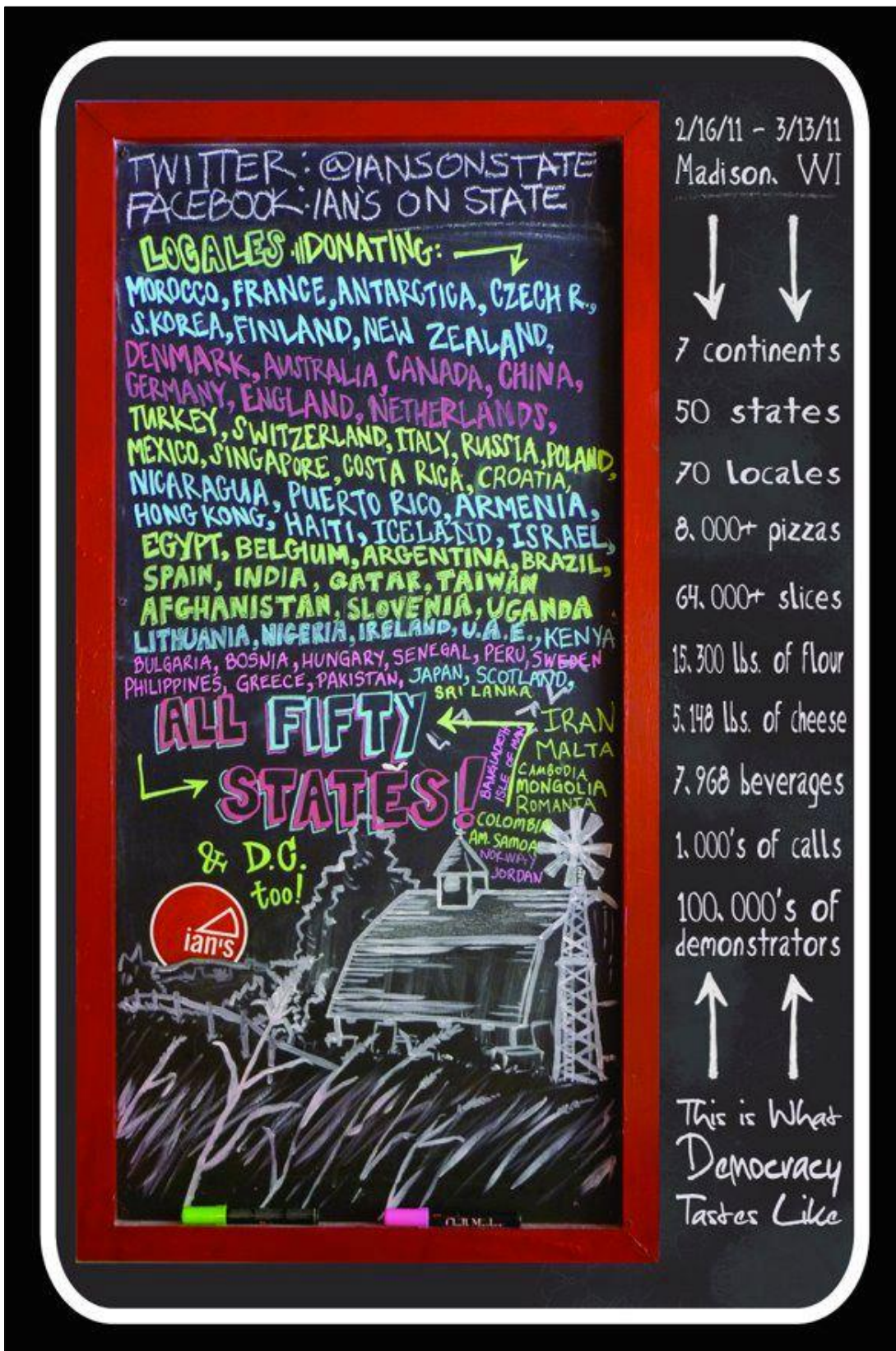


Figure 19: Ian's Pizza chalkboard of donations (Ian's Pizza Facebook Page)

implications of the protests, John Nichols stated, “Robert M. La Follette, the great Wisconsin Progressive, said that democracy is a life, i.e. it goes on constantly” (in *Forward-movie* 2011), recalling this Wisconsin icon to suggest that Wisconsinites, and citizens in general should be more politically active. Similarly, Dave McClurg shifted from symbols particular to American ideals of “civil society,” to express hope for “a more human-based society, where you are looking out for each other...trying to help other people” that connected with the global narrative of a better world and justice for all. Morello (2011) extended this vision to encompass and rally members of all fields with his narrative, “let’s make a checklist of the kind of world that we’d like to see, the kind of state we’d like see, the kind of country we’d like to see, the kind of world we’d like to see and let’s fight for that.” Shifting from one SAF to another through cuing multiple symbols and moving scales, actors such as Morello translated the meaning of the protests and called upon many actors at the same time to take action. Through donating pizzas, writing letters of support, even showing up at the protests in Madison, actors from the Wisconsin, American, and global fields implicated in these translations responded with their own message: they understood.

5.2 An Alternative Use of Cultural Tools: Cultural Difference and Dissonance

Having now illustrated the ways in which a massive number of actors successfully coalesced around the appropriation and combination of symbols from a range of SAFs, it is now relevant to note the moments in the Wisconsin protests in which translation failed, connections broke, or dissent arose: what may be considered the double-sided coin of the processes of friction. As Tsing (2005) states, “Some of the time, we don’t want to go at all, and we leave town only when they’ve bombed our homes. These kinds of ‘friction’ inflect motion, offering it different meanings. Coercion and frustration join freedom as motion is

socially informed” (p. 6). In some cases in the Wisconsin protests, actors deployed culture to close off flows, demarcate the boundaries of an SAF, or pursue contrary lines of action.

Indeed, during several instances in my interviews, actors expressed Alex Hanna’s trepidation about making connections between the Middle East and Wisconsin saying “we’re on a different plane” (Dave Kreisman) or “we’re united in the struggle but their struggles are a lot different from what the workers in Wisconsin were dealing with” (Emma Smith). Additionally, in a different form of Wisconsin exceptionalism that cordoned off what was going on in Wisconsin from what was going on in American and global SAFs, other signs stated “Wisconsin not Wisconsin” and “A weekend in Illinois can’t be fun, thanks Feb 14” (in Stopera 2011). Many signs also questioned the belonging of protesters in the Wisconsin field, making claims like “I AM a Wisconsin taxpayer are you?” and “how many Tea Partiers here today are Wisconsin voters” (in Stopera 2011). In employing such narratives of exceptionalism and difference, these protesters delineated the boundaries of their SAF in a way that perhaps may have discouraged the participation of actors from other fields.

On the day of the Tea Party rally, 12 March 2011, protesters from the Wisconsin field and beyond came to express contention with those protesting the bill. These actors used familiar cultural tools from the various fields in an entirely new way: to signal how those protesting the bill were being nonsensical, were violating “the rules” of the field, and that the viable pursuit was to follow Governor Walker’s lead. These protesters carried signs that read “Democrat Senators are Bears Fans [the Illinois Football] team” (in Kreisman 2012), suggesting that to protest the bill was not “standing with Wisconsin” but playing for the other team, and “Stop leeching, start teaching” (in Kreisman 2012), insinuating that the American dream was about individual pursuit, not dependence on government. One protester carried an image of Ronald Reagan on a horse, insinuating that the American dream of the open-range

and free individual (consistent with the American image of the cowboy) was on its way to realization.

Additionally, in my interview with Kelly Gilbert, a self-described independent who supported Walker in the protests and attended the Tea Party rally, she justified her and the governor's actions as a way to "level the playing field," in a narrative that echoed images of the equality and democracy expressed by protesters against the bill. That is, she understood the elimination of collective bargaining rights, and the weakening of union power, to be a way for a teacher like her, with a Master's degree, "to stand a chance like anybody else" in applying for jobs at public schools. She also saw her own act of protesting the protesters, and "standing with Walker" as a way to defend her civic choice of voting for Walker and express her voice in what she saw as a very "one-sided" coverage of the debate. Like some of her counterparts, Kelly also implied that this was an issue concerning actors within the field of Wisconsin, stating, "if the protesters were people who actually lived in the state and paid taxes, and things like that, that I could legitimately see. But a lot of protesters actually were from other states because the union had the funding and the resources to bring in people."

As Mische (2003) and Swidler (1986) have both emphasized, culture is not a unified system but complicated and contradictory, an argument that carries particular resonance in this section. While some actors in the protests coalesced together and made connections with other fields through common symbols, others used culture to draw boundaries, differentiate, and express dissent. Additionally, some actors pieced together the situation in an entirely different way, drawing from the very same themes, symbols, and narratives as others in their field, to make sense of and navigate alternative lines of action. Such examples reveal the faultiness, friction, conflict and creativity—what Certeau (1984) might call "the bricolage"—of culture as it is activated through action.

6. OUTCOMES: INNOVATION AND RETOOLING

Thus far, I have illustrated the ways in which actors, through the “moods and motivations” (Swidler 1986: 284) of cultural toolkits, come to participate in the Wisconsin protests and how actors from numerous fields form coalitions and complementary lines of action, and sometimes detachment and alternative modes of action. However, this series of actions, along with shaping the action from the Wisconsin, American, and global SAFs, also carried particular implications for the nature and organization of the field environment. In Figure 20 on the next page, I have shown how this intersection of actors and cultural toolkits allows for a new field to emerge—the Wisconsin protests SAF—a process I will explain further in this chapter. Additionally, I will show how this new SAF has consequences for actors and their fields, inciting processes of cultural transformation and transmission.

6.1 A Newly Formed Field

In explaining emergent fields, Fligstein and McAdam (2011) argue that “new SAFs are likely to emerge nearby existing SAFs” and that “they are likely to be populated by groups who ‘migrate’” (p. 12). Indeed, I have shown in the previous chapters how actors from the surrounding SAFs of Wisconsin, America, and the world come to act in the protests, and in doing so bring along their cultural toolkits to make sense of the field, as the arrows going into the field in Figure 20 indicate. However, Fligstein and McAdam (2011) also argue that actors innovate new ways of organizing social space, by adapting their understanding of other fields to the newly emerged field, a process that can be seen in the field of the Wisconsin protests. As a result, new cultural forms were created, that would later have an effect on other fields and actors.

In an article written by sociology students from the UW Teaching Assistants Association (Acar, Grainger, Luft et al 2011), they expressed the reconfiguration and creation

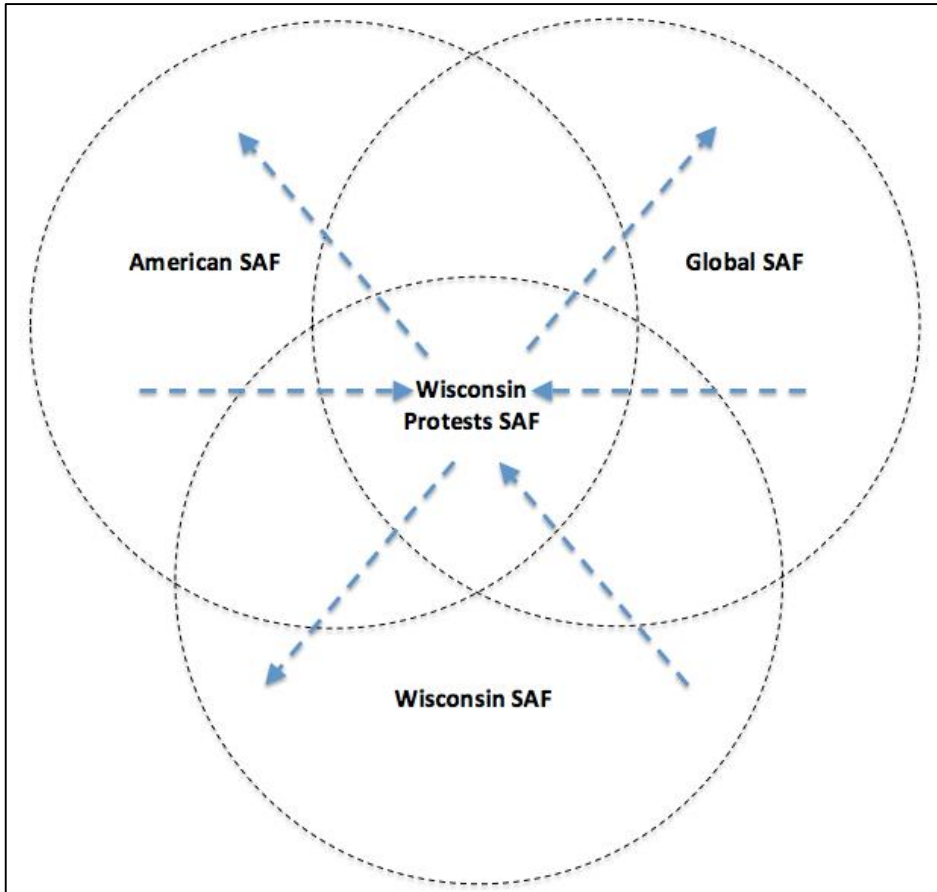


Figure 20: Wisconsin, American, and global strategic action fields intersect to create a new field



Figure 21: The "Capitol City" (*Lawsonry.com*)

of culture in a new toolkit for the Wisconsin protests SAF:

To us, the Capitol was transformed into ‘Capitol City’³²—a newly defined space with its own rules, language, symbols, rituals, and meanings. Anyone could come and live in the Capitol, and hundreds of people, including students, members of various unions, environmental groups, disability rights organizations, police, firefighters, and others, did...plenty of food was provided [by local restaurants]...but it was also delivered compliments of backers from every state in the U.S. and many countries around the world... (P. 54-55)

While the students expressed the geographic association of this SAF with the Capitol building in Madison, they also welcomed and credited the actions of those from other fields in shaping the order of the newly emerged space. This ethic was expressed further through signs hung in the Capitol building that said “Home sweet home” (in Kreisman 2012) and claimed “there’s no violence here” (in Stopera 2011), a view of the protest space that was also referenced by my interviewees. Dave Kreisman stated that “they treated it like a home” and that protesters tried to show respect to the building and other protesters by making rules and schedules to keep the space clean and peaceful. Fred Risser commented on his surprise about there being no violence or “bad actors in the group,” the woman who drove from Missouri commented “I’ve never met a more peaceful and amazing group of people” (in M. Davis 2011), and Onawa Powell described that “it felt like a community” with people bringing food and setting up first aid stations. Additionally, rituals such as the Solidarity Sing-Along, during which actors from the protests sang protest songs at noon everyday in the Capitol rotunda (a practice that still continues),³³ were routinized actions that worked to establish order in the field.

In addition to these narratives and practices of the field, new images, anecdotes, and heroes emerged. Artists began creating paintings, poetry, prints, films and songs from the inspiration that the protest offered and thereby helped to capture the memory of the protests. The tale of the “Koch brothers call,” in which Ian Murphy, a journalist from New York, was able to reach Governor Walker via telephone by pretending to be David Koch (Elliott 2011),

³² See Figure 21.

³³ I learned of this from Dave Kreisman and was a participant-observant of the practice on one day in April 2012.

was commonly referenced throughout the protests. This roused a series of jokes, internet memes, and signs all referencing the event and Walker’s corporate allies, and was mentioned in my interviews several times as prominent memory of the protests. The “Ian’s pizza guys” also became symbols and heroes of the protest action. In my interview with Adam, he stated that the Ian’s Facebook page grew from 4,000 to 15,000 fans in the short span of two weeks and that some of those who donated pizzas later made a point of pilgrimaging to the institution, a celebration of the protest field that he summed up with the phrase “if you said Ian’s everybody was like, yeah!!!” Fred Risser felt a similar idolatry from those in the field for his act of fleeing the state, saying, “we were treated like heroes.”

Such examples illustrate that with the emergence of this field, came the emergence of a new cultural toolkit. In adjusting to the unfamiliar dynamics of the Wisconsin protests SAF, actors sought to establish a sense of order by creating new rules, practices, art forms, and narratives: models that could provide a basis for how to navigate the field. However, the Wisconsin protests did not only result in the emergence of a new cultural toolkit, but also a “re-tooling” of others’ within and out of the field. In the next section, I explain how the protest field came to have a “ripple effect” on the organization of other fields, and on individual perceptions, in a process of cultural transmission.

6.2 *Adding to the Toolkit (Both Collective and Individual)*

Fligstein and McAdam (2011) argue that forms of organizing action, or cultural forms, created in a new field come to shape other nearby fields. In the case of the Wisconsin protests, actors—through the motivation of already established cultural toolkits that made acting in the protests meaningful—encountered the protest space and thus also encountered the opportunity to learn new ways of acting. That is, in entering the space, as the arrows directed into the field in Figure 20 indicate, those who were involved could “borrow”

(Fligstein and McAdam 2011: 13) or draw from the culture of the protest SAF, to make sense of other fields. In doing so, they consequently added to their own toolkits, as well as the collective cultural toolkit of other SAFs such as Wisconsin, America, and the global sphere, as the arrows pointing out of the protest SAF in Figure 20 illustrate. In this section, I elaborate on this process of cultural transmission and learning, showing how actors acquire new tools for understanding within the Wisconsin protests, an experience they carry with them to other fields.

Many of the protesters expressed a feeling of transformation or a learning process in living through the Wisconsin protests. Mark Fraire mentioned that the experience “brought Wisconsin closer” to him, an insinuation that he had a new understanding of the field. Many of my interviewees also stated that they were more political now, and that protesting had incited a passion for civic engagement. Dave McClurg felt more empowered and said “I check my news every morning...gathering more and more research” and Brian Austin said that a “switch was flipped” and that he was so much more aware of the way corporate politics works in the United States. Similarly, Kelly Gilbert, although a supporter of the bill, said she too felt more politically engaged: “I did start reading a lot more...and learning a lot more about, I don’t want to say just collective bargaining, but on politics on the whole, and just exactly when you’re paying taxes, where does it go?” Dave Kreisman summarized such experiences as a “a civics lesson,” explaining: “People actually understand the way state government works now. And understand conference committee, and up and down votes, and fiscal issues...People didn’t even know who their state rep was. Now, they know exactly and they’re involved at the local level, they understand.” Through encountering the protests SAF, actors gained such new tools for understanding and thus opening more possibilities for action.

On a collective level, those who protested brought cultural tools acquired in the protests SAF to the other fields, what can be termed a “spillover” (Fligstein and McAdam

2011: 10), and thus a “re-tooling” of Wisconsin, American, and global SAF cultures. In Wisconsin, the protests became a narrative that formed part of the collective memory of Wisconsinites, already commemorated in books, films, and exhibitions. For example, in March 2011, Sarah Stolte, an art history student at UW, came up with the idea to curate an exhibition on art related to the protests.³⁴ Sharing her idea with Sonia Kubica, curator of the Madison gallery Project Lodge, the two began organizing *SolidARTity*, an exhibition that recognized the “incredible breath of creative voice” (Project Lodge 2011) in the protests and eventually, was donated to the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Additionally, the memory of the protests has been especially relevant to the recall campaign. In the Wisconsin Labor History Society conference I attended, entitled “It’s Not Over,” members worked to understand what could be learned from the protests and where it could take them in the recall and in future union efforts. For many of my interviewees, the memory of the protests is what allowed them to make sense of participating in the recall campaign altogether.

The collective cultural toolkit of the American SAF also became reconfigured to include symbols of Wisconsin protests, one of which was the narrative of the events as one of “the largest protests...in North American history” (Forward-movie 2011). In March 2011, a curator from the Smithsonian came to the protests to collect signs to be incorporated in the museum’s archives. She stated, “This is part of the museum’s long tradition of documenting how Americans participate in the political process...we try to collect everything that helps to understand the national experience” (in Ariosto 2011). The importance of these symbols in the American field was further emphasized when through a poll, the “Fab 14” was chosen for *Time* magazine’s list of the 100 most influential people of 2011, of which person-of-the-year was “the protester” (Time 2011). The culture of the Wisconsin protests became perceived as part of the broader American experience, as a symbol of civic action.

³⁴ I learned about this exhibition through my research and spoke with Sarah about how the planning unfolded.

Globally, many protesters situated the Wisconsin protests as a precursor to what would later be the international Occupy movement and a symbol of creating a better world. Emma mentioned that she thought that the tactic of occupying public space was appropriated from the Wisconsin protests and described its use for inspiration, stating, “I’m sure it helped people’s faith in the movement...they did it before is...this tiny little city in the Midwest...why can’t other people have bigger occupations?” This is an idea that Dave Kreisman also articulated saying, “I think you can argue that that started here.” Ryan Harvey, an American musician who was part of the Wisconsin protests, the Indignados movement in Barcelona in May 2011, and who later became heavily involved in Occupy movement, wrote a song about how Wisconsin inspired him, singing:

But hey Wisconsin, you captured my heart
You gave me hope the way you fought
You sparked something and you opened a door...
It was so important what you did...
How it empowered its participants...
How it altered public consciousness
How it shaped a future movement...
How it gave us all some guidance. (Harvey 2012)

Through this song, Harvey expresses how what happened in Wisconsin gave him the tools for understanding and pursuing whole new lines of action. In another piece, Harvey (2011) resituated this story of learning and awareness, calling on people to “defend and celebrate” this memory and folding it into a global narrative of protesters fighting corporate dominance all over the world.

Thus, through their encounter with the emergent Wisconsin protests SAF, protesters created and acquired new forms of culture. This new field offered new ways of perceiving and understanding: a “lesson,” a “switch,” an “opening” of doors, or a way, in Swidler’s terms, of adding to the cultural toolkit. In this retooling, actors brought shifts within the surrounding Wisconsin, American, and global SAFs, adding to the collective imagination new symbols, stories, and practices, to be drawn upon by actors in future social processes.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

All men take a natural pleasure in learning quickly; words denote something; and so those words are pleasantest which give us *new* knowledge. Strange words have no meaning for us; common terms we know already; it is *metaphor* which gives us most of this pleasure. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3:10, quoted in Benson and Prosser 1988: 245)

What Aristotle said here captures the processes related to the Wisconsin protests that I have discussed in this thesis. Indeed, like the metaphor, a type of symbol, the cultural toolkits formed in the strategic action fields of Wisconsin, America, and the global sphere, offered ways of understanding the “strangeness” of a new legislative bill and the consequent and newly emergent protest space. In enacting the symbols and practices of their fields, actors communicated and understood that the actions of the governor were more than a dispossession of rights and resources, they were an attack on a way of life or a violation of “the rules,” a message that was translated to all three fields and through which actors formed solidarities.

As such, actors in these spaces navigated the situation in the ways that they knew how: moving forward, protecting the American dream, and making a better and more just world, among others. Actors found these viable paths clearly articulated in a discursive process that, along with creating the moods and motivations to participate, also help shape the new protest field and its cultural toolkit. Actors thus entered this newly emergent field through the ease and familiarity of recognizing the meaningful cultural tools of their own SAFs, and in doing so, were exposed to the “pleasure” of the new knowledge of the protest field: narratives, practices, images, and understandings to take with them to other fields. Such an imagining of the protests not only explains the “ripple effect” of action infiltrating the Wisconsin protests SAF, but also highlights the potential for understanding the “ripple effect” of the Wisconsin protests on other social processes. More broadly, it offers insight into the role of culture in our lives and how we (sometimes unintentionally) move and change.

Indeed, further studies might examine how other cultural toolkits came to penetrate the Cheddar Revolution, or more complexly examine its effects on other fields. In my interview with Brian Austin, he explained to me how police officers brought donuts to the protests as a sign of support (referencing the common stereotype of “cop” eating habits), an example that suggests to me that there are many more symbols and practices to be found in the Wisconsin protests enacted from other fields, including the prominent and more formalized unions and professional associations. In addition, a more micro-study might analyze the trajectories of a handful of protesters, following the fields in which they act, and if overlapping cultural toolkits enable the use of certain symbols more than others. Furthermore, in a study of outcomes, one might look at the social movement processes related to the governor recall election in Wisconsin on 5 June 2012, or to the international Occupy movement in 2011, in relation this study, exploring which symbols from the Wisconsin protests SAF spill over and are enacted. Where culture takes us from there, I leave for future translation.

APPENDIX

A. List of Interviewees and Background Information

	Name	Date of Interview	Profession	Position in the Protests
1.	Brian Austin	April 20, 2012	Police Officer	Exempted public employee involved in the protests in and around the Capitol building in Madison; spearheaded “Cops for Labor” group
2.	Tony Castaneda	April 18, 2012	Musician, Radio Host	Long-time activist involved in the protests in and around the Capitol building in Madison
3.	Mark Fraire	April 10, 2012	Grants Program and Services Specialist at Wisconsin Arts Board (state agency)	Long-time activist and affected public employee involved in the protests in and around the Capitol building in Madison and art show on the protests, SolidARTity
4.	Kelly Gilbert	May 1, 2012	Teacher at private school	Self-described Independent who attended the Tea Party Rally on the Capitol Square in February and supported the bill
5.	Alex Hanna	April 26, 2012	Graduate Student at University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-president of the Teaching Assistants Association (TAA)	Involved in the initial Valentine’s Day demonstration at the Capitol and camped in the Capitol building throughout February
6.	Dave Kreisman	April 26, 2012	Political Organizer for We Are Wisconsin and Photographer	Self-described as a photographer, not a protester, in the protests who documented the events in and around the Capitol building
7.	Adam May	April 9, 2012	Marketing Director at Ian’s Pizza	Managed Facebook page, messages and contributions from pizza donation campaign at Ian’s throughout February and March
8.	Dave McClurg	April 30, 2012	Police Officer	Self-described former Republican who joined “Cops for Labor” and protests in and around the Capitol building
9.	Onawa Powell	April 26, 2012	Cashier at a market/Senior at Madison East High School during the protests	Led the student walkout at Madison East High School in support of teachers
10.	Fred Risser	April 10, 2012	State Senator in the Wisconsin Legislature	“Fab 14” member who fled to Illinois in order to prevent bill passage

11.	Emma Smith	March 7, 2012	Student at Central European University	Drove from New York to Madison in March to protest against the passage of the bill
12.	Don White	April 30, 2012	Teacher at public middle school in Madison	Self-described former moderate Republican who was involved in the protests in and around the Capitol building

B. Sample Interview Guide

What were you doing when the protests began in Madison? What was the first news you heard of them?

How did you become involved? How were you involved?

Where were you during the protest? Did you stay in one place or did move around?

What compelled you to join? Why did you feel that this moment was important?

Did anyone/anything influence you to join?

Did you feel that you could offer something to the movement with your participation? If so, how?

How many times did you attend? Was there any particular day that was memorable?

Was there anything memorable from the protest that sticks in your mind? A particular moment or event?

Was there a particular piece of literature, music, art, image, etc. that spoke to you in this protest?

Who did you interact with at the protests?

What do you think this protest addressed? What did it mean to you or in your opinion, what was it about?

Why do you think other people participated?

Did you feel like this protest responded to anything else going on in the nation, and the world?

What do you think this protest did? Did it have any effect?

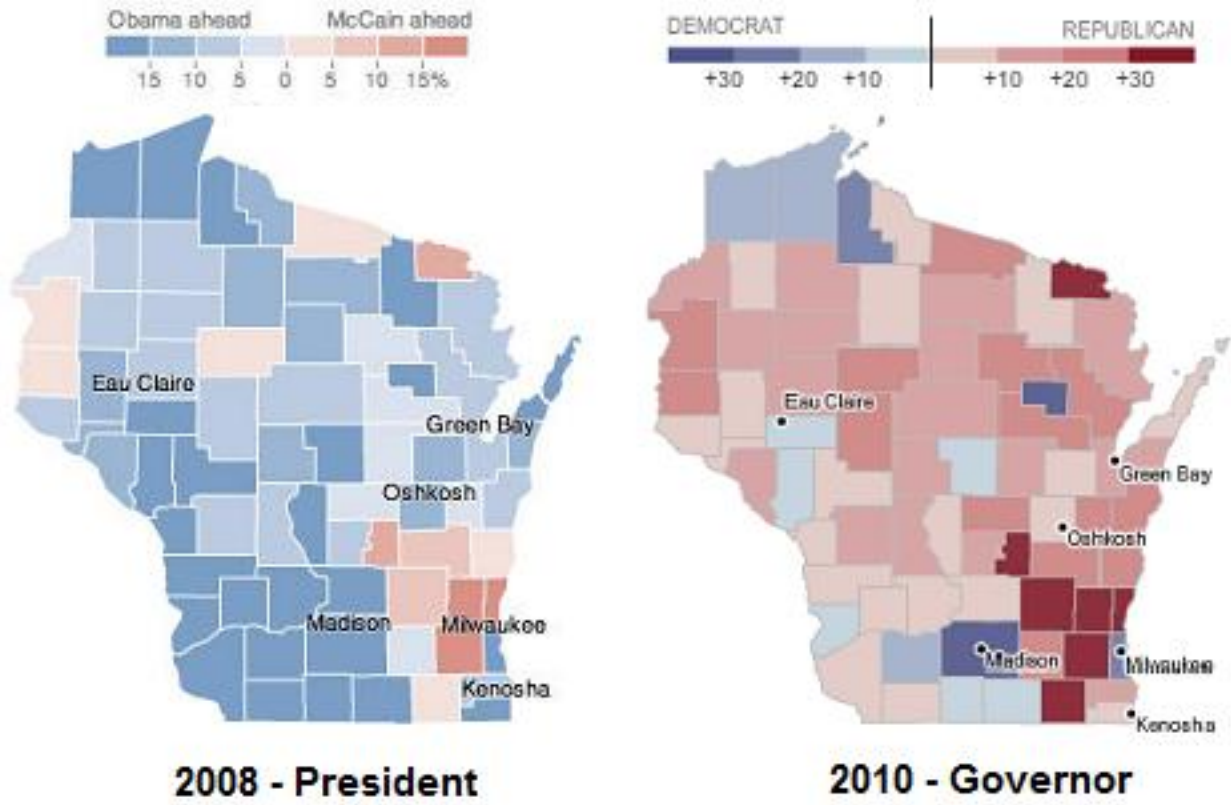
How did this protest affect your own personal life?

If the recall campaign is unsuccessful, do you think it still carries relevance?

How/where do you see this protest in broader scheme of history?

How should this protest be remembered?

C. Wisconsin as a “Swing State”



Source: New York Times

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