

The Transnational Politics of Environmental NGOs

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There is a widespread sense that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) greatly influence the way the international system addresses environmental issues.¹ This perception stems from the recognition that there are literally thousands of NGOs throughout the world working for environmental protection and that they devote significant resources to their campaigns. While many sense that NGOs affect world environmental issues, there is, however, little understanding about the ways in which NGOs actually carry out their work. What strategies do NGOs utilize to advance their aims? Why do they choose these methods of political engagement? How do these efforts actually end up influencing the international system?

The most likely answers to these questions revolve around the viewpoint that NGOs are primarily interest groups that lobby governments to promote their cause. To put it differently, NGOs are pressure groups that work to influence the way states, and the international institutions states set up, address environmental issues. The guiding assumption of this orientation is that states constitute the seat of political power in the international system and that all sincere political effort must be directed at shaping the way they operate.

In many ways, this view is accurate. NGOs expend tremendous effort lobbying states and influencing international regime formation and implementation. But their efforts do not stop there nor are such strategies undertaken separate from a host of other forms of political practice. In the most general sense, NGOs wish to advance the cause of environmental protection. They recognize that environmentally harmful human practices take place at the individual, group, corporate and state level, and aim to reorient human practices at all levels of collective life. To do so, they enlist the governing power not simply of states--which have a mixed record of shaping widespread behavior with respect to environmental issues within their own territories (think, for example, of weak states like Somalia)--but also of economic and socio-cultural forces that significantly influence human activity. These forces, like governmental power, can be understood as nodes of governance, in that they shape widespread thought and behavior.² They represent mechanisms that influence human activity, in all areas of life, including human interaction with nature. Environmental NGOs recognize that there are a host of targets in the world and there are multiple mechanisms of political power with which to engage them. Their strategies for greater ecological protection, then, aim at multiple levels of collective life and enlist numerous forms of governance.

This paper outlines the range of strategies NGOs undertake to advance environmental protection. It does so by concentrating on three types of governance mechanisms and studying the way NGOs work to manipulate them. First, it looks at state forms of power. The state enjoys the ability to shape widespread behavior based on its monopoly of legitimate coercive power within a given territory. It passes laws and backs them up through the threat of force. NGOs recognize the powerful capability of states to shape extensive practices and work to influence

¹ I would like to thank Edward Comor and Judith Shapiro for helpful comments during the writing of this paper. I would also like to thank Volker Rittberger for insightful comments on an earlier draft.

² On the concept of governance, see Paul Wapner 1996, 3ff.

states' policies. Thus, while NGOs do more than lobby states, as mentioned, their lobbying efforts are essential to their activities and deserve attention. Hence, the paper first catalogues and explains how NGOs engage states and the state-system. Second, it looks at economic forms of power. People, as individuals and organized in groups, make decisions partially based on economic incentives. Many economic structures that establish incentives, however, fail to consider environmental issues and thus often support environmentally harmful practices. NGOs recognize this and strive to manipulate economic structures in the interest of environmental protection. These efforts make up an important strategy of NGO politics. Third and finally, the paper focuses on social mores. People go through a socialization process wherein they learn to take cues from their peers and the institutions of social life. Like economic factors, these often support environmentally harmful activities or, put more positively, can be harnessed to advance environmental protection. As a result, NGOs target social proprieties in their campaigns for a healthier and more robust environment.

These three forms of governance represent conditioning factors that greatly shape widespread thought and action. Since NGOs aim, overall, to shift the way people think about and act toward the earth's ecosystem, they see themselves having to engage all forms. Appreciating the strategies they use to do so, and the overall frame of reference that informs such strategies, is crucial for understanding how and why NGOs influence world environmental affairs. The paper, in short, aims to substantiate the assumption that NGOs influence the way the international system addresses environmental issues. It does so by providing a broad understanding of the meaning of the international system--through a discussion of forms of governance--and by delineating the role NGOs perform in engaging it.

Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations: Definitions

In the loosest sense of the term, non-governmental organizations are groups made up of people who come together to share interests, ideologies, cultural affinities and so forth, outside the formal organs of the state. Substantively, NGOs may arise to promote economic interests, enjoy recreational or educational activities, undertake public service, or advance cultural and religious values. In each case, however, the term NGO is used in a negative sense: it means simply that people organize themselves on their own rather than under rubric of state power. When the term is used in international politics, NGOs usually refer to groups that form on a voluntary basis with the aim of addressing a given problem in the world or advancing a particular cause (Weiss and Gordenker 1996, 19). Put differently, NGOs work to alleviate what they perceive to be hardships or misfortunes, or work to change the way people think and act with regard to public issues. As such, scholars tend to exclude for-profit economic actors in their understanding of NGOs. These entities aim foremost to produce financial wealth and are driven by the goal of maximizing profit. They are principally unconcerned with solving a certain problem or advancing a particular political agenda (Korten 1990, 96-98). Likewise, scholars tend to exclude intergovernmental agencies in their understanding. These entities--often called intergovernmental organizations (IGOs)--do, in fact, work to alleviate problems and promote certain agendas, but do so at the behest of states. Indeed, they are often staffed by state representatives. NGOs, to put it concisely, are political organizations that arise and operate outside the formal offices of the state, and are devoted to addressing public issues.

While NGOs exist and operate at many levels of political life, those of interest to scholars of international politics are usually ones that are organized or take actions that have relevance across national boundaries. Some groups, such as Amnesty International or Doctors Across Borders, have actual offices in multiple countries and undertake campaigns outside of the parameters of given states. Other groups, such as the Sierra Club in the US or the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the UK, staff offices within particular countries but address problems that have transnational and, at times, global significance. Grassroots movements of all sorts fall into this latter category. These groups are able to project extra-territorial relevance because the campaigns in which they are involved often relate to broader struggles in other countries or because communication technologies advertise their efforts and relate them to the sensibilities of citizens outside the domestic context.

For many scholars, it is the transnational dimension, in addition to the political and non-governmental ones, that marks the notable character of NGOs. This allows NGOs to assume a certain perspective on issues and carry out untraditional activities. Organized across borders or projecting their efforts beyond their given territorial home, NGOs assume a certain purchase point on issues that, at times, allows them the so-called 'view from nowhere,' that is, a view from no given geographical place in particular. NGOs can focus upon issues and pursue aims free from the task of preserving and enhancing the welfare of a given, geographically situated population. This does not mean that they somehow assume a genuinely globalist perspective--in politics such a view is almost always a chimera--it simply notes the non-territoriality of their point of view. While not global in perspective, it certainly generates a non-national one. NGOs are, to use Rosenau's insightful phrase, 'sovereignty-free actors' (1990).

A final definitional comment on NGOs in general is that they come in many political stripes and, although much of the literature focuses on so-called progressive NGOs, there are many right-wing organizations that have the same character and operate using the same strategies as their progressive counterparts. The organization Aryan Nations, for example, has offices in multiple countries and tries to generate solidarity across borders among white people of European descent and inspire hostility toward others (Ridgeway 1995). The National Rifle Association of the US is also a bonafide NGO. Although headquartered in the US, in 1997 it launched a transnational campaign to support unrestricted possession of fire arms, in part to resist attempts to curb widespread trade in small arms. The term NGO, then, is a broad phrase that includes a wide variety of political organizations. The key is that these groups address given challenges in the world or advance certain causes that have transnational public relevance.

Environmental NGOs are a subset of NGOs more generally. At the most generous level of attribution and using an ideal-typical formulation, one could say that these are groups dedicated to protecting the quality of air, land and water throughout the world and the continued existence and thriving of non-human species. This is generous because it suggests unconditional altruistic intentions when, in fact, we know that this is not the whole picture. Environmental NGOs are also bureaucratic organizations that often care as much about their own preservation--and therefore compete with each other--as other large organizations. The formulation is ideal-typical in that it suggests that environmental issues are easily distinguishable from other challenges when, in fact, this also is not always the case. In much of the world, protecting the environment is often a byproduct of efforts to protect a community's economic base or to resist

severe social dislocations. That is, many so-called environmental NGOs do not conceptualize themselves as necessarily sensitive to non-human species or to the quality of water, land and air but see themselves as campaigners for better living conditions (defined in an extremely broad manner).³ Notwithstanding these qualifications, it is convenient and not all that inaccurate to say that groups falling under the rubric of environmental NGO have some connection to protection of the non-human world and it is this character, however, thin, that enables one to analyze them together as a distinct entity.⁴

Like other NGOs, environmental NGOs exist and operate at multiple levels. There are, for instance, local groups that address particular environmental threats within a given community or domestic region. In the village of Zom, Senegal, for example, grassroots groups work to protect the fertility of agricultural land. Many of these groups arose after a severe drought in 1984 and dedicated themselves to rebuilding topsoil and planting rice. As of the early 1990s, they were still working locally to protect land quality (Fisher 1993, 29). Likewise, the Anacostia Watershed Society in Maryland works to protect the well-being of the Anacostia River and its tributaries. Since its founding in 1989, it has worked continuously to remove debris from the riverbed, plant trees to restore habitat and mobilize local volunteers in the District of Columbia and south-central Maryland. In addition to local groups, there are national ones. These are organizations that focus their efforts on protecting environmental quality throughout a given state. The Green Belt movement in Kenya, for instance, is a women's organization aimed at combating desertification and alleviating famine throughout the country. It works mainly by establishing local tree nurseries and planting seedlings (Fisher 1993, 102-103). The Natural Resources Defense Council in the US is similar in its focus on environmental quality in the US. It has chapters nationwide and addresses domestic water, air and land quality. Finally, there are transnational or global environmental NGOs. These are groups organized across state boundaries and committed explicitly to regional or global environmental protection. Greenpeace International, Friends of the Earth and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) are probably the most well-known of these kinds of NGOs.

As mentioned, scholars of international politics are most interested in the last type of NGO. Transnational NGOs care about transboundary environmental phenomena and deliberately engage the international system. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that each of the other types of environmental NGOs can, at times, have transnational relevance. Depending on the issue area, domestic organizations can have a strong influence on international environmental affairs (Princen and Finger 1994). When Chico Mendes, the head of the National Council of Rubber Tappers (CNS, Brazilian acronym) in the western Amazon state of Acre, was killed while attempting to defend the rights of rubber tappers and protect the rain forest, his death produced an outcry from the international community that enhanced pressures on the Brazilian government to reverse its deforestation policies (Conca, Alberty and Dabelko 1995, 78). Thus, while CNS was a domestic NGO, Mendes' death had an impact on transnational issues such as

³ A poignant example of such environmental NGOs can be found in Dawson 1996.

⁴ For an insightful discussion of the interplay between, say, environment and development groups, see Durning 1989.

biodiversity and, due to the relationship between deforestation and carbon sequestration, global climate change.

The Power, Presence and Character of Environmental NGOs

Taken together, the host of environmental NGOs throughout the world represent a variegated presence through which voices and pressures in favor of environmental protection are being articulated and generated. While data is sketchy, it is estimated that there are tens of thousands of NGOs that are working in some capacity to protect the environment (Conca 1996, 106-107).⁵ Moreover, insofar as some of these organizations have memberships in the millions and budgets of over \$200 million, at least on the surface, they represent a potentially powerful force in world environmental affairs. In fact, in 1994, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) budget was roughly \$75 million while Greenpeace's was \$100 million and WWF's was \$200 million.⁶ Finally, the number, membership figures and financial power of NGOs fail to represent, what is perhaps NGOs' most important strength, viz., the coalition building between organizations. At least since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, and much more pronounced since the 1992 Earth Summit, NGOs have established networks among themselves to exchange information, share offices and coordinate strategies. Although there is no way to measure the combined effects of NGO coordination, it is probably fair to say that the environmental NGO community as a whole is larger than the sum of its parts. Insofar as it speaks and acts with a coordinated voice, its efforts can be directed toward multiple targets with similar effect. There are, for example, many formal networks established that organize activity. The Antarctic and Southern Oceans Coalition, for instance, coordinates activities among 200 NGOs in forty countries with respect to Antarctica and its surrounding oceans. The Fifty Years is Enough Campaign (FYE) coordinates the efforts of dozens of NGOs to reform the World Bank. At an informal level, it is well known that many groups formulate policy and orientation together and project a common voice (Sale 1993, 33-34; Fisher 1993, 57-70).

While NGOs have much strength and represent an ostensibly important set of actors in world environmental affairs, they are not all alike nor above criticism. Notwithstanding the coordination just mentioned, some environmental NGOs have drastically opposing understandings of what would promote a healthy environment and work, at times, at cross-purposes. There are, for example, organizations linked to the 'wise use' movement in the US who claim to be environmentalists and insert themselves nationally and transnationally into environmental debates. Many of these are networked with industry-based groups who argue that they are committed to clean air, water and so forth if these can be achieved purely through market mechanisms (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1996; Kaufman 1994; Thiele 1997). Such groups are organized at the international level, playing an advocacy role for industries and businesses that

⁵ If one includes the host of organizations in the south that are not directly committed to environmental issues but which forge coalitions with environmental NGOs, this number jumps to hundreds of thousands. See Julie Fisher, "Third World NGOs: A Missing piece to the Population Puzzle," *Environment*, 36 (7), 1994, pp 6-11, 37-41, cited in Conca 1996.

⁶ For membership and budget figures, see Wapner 1996, 2, note 3.

oppose regulation on certain issues. The Global Climate Coalition and the Alliance for Responsible CFC Policy represent perhaps the best known of these organizations. Moreover, it is well-known that Northern and Southern-based NGOs often have different visions of environmental protection and different understandings of the proper means for achieving such visions. This was demonstrated poignantly in the criticism launched by the Center for Science and Environment (CSE) in Delhi against research undertaken by the World Resources Institute (WRI) concerning estimates of carbon production throughout the world. CSE argued that WRI's numbers failed to take into account per capita carbon production and thus portrayed many developing countries as heavy carbon producers when, if population is taken into account, they are actually much more environmentally benign. This criticism was important because WRI's estimates were being taken by many Northern NGOs and some states as the starting point for much debate about climate change. The CSE critique undermined the implicit notion of consensus among all environmental NGOs and underlined the sheer diversity of outlook (Agarwal and Narain 1991 and 1992; See generally Athanasiou 1996).

Environmental NGOs deserve careful scrutiny insofar as they are unelected and relatively unaccountable. World Wide Fund for Nature, Friends of the Earth and other large NGOs speak with a tremendous amount of authority. A 1997 poll demonstrated this when it found that German youth placed more credibility in Greenpeace than in any other institutional authority. Among 14-18 year olds, Greenpeace ranked higher than political parties, unions, television personalities and politicians in terms of public trust (Zitelmann 1997). Given the high profile of environmental NGOs, one might reasonably ask who they represent and on what grounds their authority rests. NGOs are ultimately accountable to their funders. And yet, those funders do not necessarily represent the public interest. Hence, while environmental NGOs work for the well-being of the environment, it is important to remember that their understanding of environmental protection is not above the fray of political life. It is, as mentioned, above statist orientations and this is extremely important for locating their authority. This does not free them, however, from other types of loyalty that may skew their understanding of environmental issues.

Actions to Change State Behavior

States are the most important actors in world politics and fundamentally constitute the international system. They have the ability significantly to shape widespread behavior within their own territories and thus represent key mechanisms of global governance. The governing capacity of states is so impressive that the international system itself is often equated with the state-system. Environmental protection involves shaping widespread behavior throughout the world so any effort to advance environmental well-being will inevitably rely partially on states to implement large-scale change. NGOs understand this and thus focus much of their energies on enlisting states in their campaigns (Princen and Finger 1994; Wapner 1996). How do they do so?

Environmental NGOs influence state action primarily by pressuring government officials to support environmental protection efforts. At the international level, this entails NGOs inserting themselves into and manipulating the dynamics of public international regimes.⁷

⁷ On the distinction between private and public international regimes, see Haufler 1997. This is the first full-length exploration of private international regimes of which I am aware.

International regimes are rules, codes of conduct, principles and so forth that inform interstate behavior; environmental regimes are those that guide interstate behavior with regard to environmental issues. States create environmental regimes to address transboundary environmental problems, as air, water, shifting soils and migratory animals, for example, care little for passports or state patrol guards. As a result, environmental challenges call on states to coordinate their activities so as to fashion common responses to collective threats. While systematic understanding of the role of NGOs in regime life is still emerging, examples of NGO participation convey a sense of widespread involvement and impact. Preliminary findings suggest that NGOs play a significant role in all stages of regime formation, continuity and modification.

Scholars explain regime formation in three ways: as arising as a result of power, interest or knowledge (Hansenclever, Mayer and Rittberger 1996; Young 1994; Rowlands 1995). The first explanation emphasizes the distribution of power within the international system; the second focuses on forging common interests among states; the third points to the way new information reshapes state identities and interests. In each case, how a state understands and wishes to act with regard to environmental issues is crucial. For example, to the degree a hegemon is responsible for the emergence of a regime, it matters how the hegemon perceives and sees its interests being advanced or threatened by a given environmental issue. Likewise, to the degree that mutual interests drive regime formation, it matters how states perceive environmental issues and how they come to see them as common problems in which there is a shared stake that inspires cooperation. Finally, to the degree that new information is responsible for regimes, it matters how that information is understood and disseminated. NGOs draw attention to environmental issues--a task that includes interpreting scientific information and advertising given threats--and this helps create domestic and international pressure on states to establish environmental regimes. To be sure, NGOs are not single-handedly responsible for the creation of regimes but their work as publicists on behalf of environmental challenges contributes to the formation of state understandings and interests, whether one is referring to those of a hegemon or group of states.

The international toxic waste trade involves the exportation of hazardous refuse from one country to another. In search of less expensive ways to dispose of hazardous wastes, countries have until recently allowed waste handlers to send materials outside the country of origin without monitoring or regulation. This practice took place largely because few people or states were aware of its magnitude or dangerous character. Starting in the mid-1980s, Greenpeace began a campaign that investigated and publicized instances of such exportation. Its offices around the world coordinated activities with shipping enterprises and governments to trace the dynamics of the international toxic waste trade. Among its most important efforts, Greenpeace alerted importing states about shipments, published a newsletter that, for years, was the only source of information on the waste trade, and raised the issue with national governments and multiple international organizations to draw attention to its hazardous effects on the planet. Due in large part to Greenpeace's efforts, in the mid-1980s UNEP facilitated negotiations for controlling the toxic waste trade. The result was the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. The Convention essentially outlaws the transportation of most toxic substances from member states of the Organization of Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD) to non-OECD countries.⁸

In terms of monitoring and verification of environmental regimes, NGOs increasingly play both formal and informal roles in investigating and reporting violations. According to the US General Accounting Office and other sources, compliance with international environmental agreements is inadequate (GAO 1992; Ausubel and Victor 1992). States often fail to submit reports of relevant activity or live up to agreed-upon commitments. NGOs play an important role in trying to improve the record of compliance. In the case of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (with both government and non-government members) provides secretariat services on a UNEP contract (Ausubel and Victor 1992, 13; Young 1989, 26). Furthermore, in an unusual arrangement, IUCN delegates research, monitoring and technical assistance functions to Traffic, which is a joint project of IUCN and WWF. WWF, with offices and long-standing working relationships with shipping docks around the world, is well positioned to discover CITES violations and report them to the Secretariat. NGO monitoring activities in general often lead to tightening regime measures. For example, according to Peter Sands, since the inception of the European Union, more than half of the infringement proceedings relating to international environmental issues entered against members states were based on formal complaints from local and regional environmental NGOs (Sands 1990). This mimics a similar dynamic with regard to transnational NGOs and international environmental agreements.

Finally, with regard to modifying existing regimes, NGOs play a key role in tracking new scientific evidence as to the nature and intensity of environmental degradation, publicizing it and working to upgrade regimes to reflect new environmental realities. Due to the speed and complexity of environmental change, international accords are almost always in need of periodic revision. NGOs encourage such revision and have been responsible, in a few instances, for proposing the content of treaty upgrades. For example, after states established the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (brought about partially because of NGO efforts in the US and UK [Wapner 1996, 127-128, and 132]), there was a need to revise national commitments due to new scientific evidence of an expanding ozone hole over Antarctica and new discursive frames for understanding the severity of the threat (Litfin 1994). Friends of the Earth, Environmental Defense Fund and other NGOs worked vigorously to persuade state officials to enhance the Protocol. While not alone in their efforts--numerous scientists and policy-makers (part of a group of actors that Litfin calls 'knowledge brokers' [Litfin 1994]) pressed for revisions--NGOs coordinated much of the effort and their activities won government support for establishing the 1990 London Upgrades to the Protocol, which led eventually to the Copenhagen agreements that set the terms for a complete ban on ozone-depleting substances (Bramble and Porter 1992, 341). While one cannot say that NGOs were single-handedly responsible for the London and Copenhagen revisions, it is clear that they provided an essential component to the overall political effort.

NGOs thus play an important role in all phases of international environmental regimes. They recognize that such regimes, while imperfect mechanisms for environmental protection, greatly influence widespread behavior. States have the ability to reach into and shape the

⁸ See generally, Wynne 1989; Agarwal and Narain 1992.

activities of citizens throughout the world; NGOs see states and the international regimes they create, then, as efficient means of governance and appropriate targets of NGO political activity. However, states, as we shall see in a moment, are not the only forms of global governance; and thus not the only NGO targets in the international system.

Actions to Engage Economic Forces

People are motivated not simply by government-sanctioned laws but also by economic forces. Likewise, structures of power throughout the world are not reducible simply to the actions of states but also arise as a result of economic activity. Economic forces, in other words, are forms of governance. They help set the character and define the dynamics of individual and collective life. Economic activity, by definition then, greatly determines how humans interact with the natural world and how they approach issues of environmental protection.

Economic systems are constituted by a process of production, distribution, exchange and consumption. Each of these has to do with the way humans materially sustain themselves. However, the activities of production, distribution and so forth are not simply about material survival and flourishing but, because they are so central to human existence, they extend themselves into all aspects of human life. The way a society produces or exchanges goods, for instance, largely animates the way it understands itself and operates (Harvey 1996). It gives rise to, or sets the parameters of, certain identities that, in turn, create interests that translate into actual behavior.

Economic forces, like ecological ones, inherently know no boundaries. Production, distribution, exchange and consumption can, and increasingly do, take place across national boundaries. One result of this is the emergence of an integrated world economy based, according to many, on capitalist principles and dynamics (Harvey 1996, Wallerstein 1979). A related but different result is simply that economic activity shapes widespread behavior beyond the territoriality of given states. It influences identity and interests throughout the world and leads to transnational dynamics that influence the day-to-day lives of individuals everywhere and the organization of transnational collective life. Given the powerful role of economic forces, it makes sense that NGOs try to intervene in and manipulate the character of economic affairs.

Engaging economic forms of governance is no easy matter. Given the constitutive role of economic affairs, it is difficult for NGOs (or any other actor, for that matter) to gain a purchase point and direct economic activities. NGOs undertake the challenge by conceptually ‘unpacking’ the world economy and identifying certain nodes of power within it. One telling example of NGO activity along these lines is the campaign by NGOs to reform World Bank lending practices in an attempt to make them more environmentally responsible.⁹ The World Bank is the world’s largest single lender for economic development projects. It maintains a lending portfolio of over

⁹ I see the World Bank as a key player in the dynamics of the global economy. It could be argued, however, that the institution is not strictly an economic actor insofar as it is not, itself, a business enterprise. Rather, it is an inter-governmental organization (and thus should be addressed in the context of the state-system rather than the world economy). While I understand this perspective, my own view is that so much of the Bank’s work is fundamentally of an economic nature that it deserves attention as an economic force.

\$20 billion annually (Conca 1996, 109). Moreover, its actions greatly influence lending practices throughout the world insofar as its commitment to a project acts like a 'seal of approval' that works to encourage additional bilateral and multilateral funds, as well as lending from private banks (French 1994, 157). Finally, its influence extends even beyond funding for particular projects in that its policies greatly shape the type of development paths of borrower states. Conditionality associated with structural adjustment, for instance, influences broader economic dynamics within and across countries and this mobilizes economic and social activity in certain directions rather than others.¹⁰ In short, the World Bank represents a key node in the international economy.

Since the mid-1980s, NGOs have recognized the central role of the World Bank and have worked to reform its operations. Friends of the Earth, Environmental Defense Fund, Development Gap and others¹¹ have undertaken an effort to raise the level of environmental awareness in the Bank and to insist that environmental considerations become part of the Bank's lending practices. The effort began as NGOs found that numerous Bank projects were environmentally destructive and as they saw the need to publicize this insight. Among their more important campaigns, NGOs exposed how the Bank-supported Polonoroeste colonialization project, in the Brazilian state of Rondonia, which included extensive road-building and agricultural settlement, resulted in rapid and severe deforestation. One source estimates that the project helped to increase the amount of deforested land in the state by 22 percent over a ten-year period (French 1994, 160). NGOs also campaigned against Bank funding of the Sardar Sarovar dam, part of Narmada River Project in India. The Sardar Sarovar, a priority for the Bank in the early 1990s, threatens to inundate agricultural lands, wipe out numerous plants and animals, and reduce downstream productivity due to salinization and erosion of deltas; it will also displace hundreds of thousands of people. For NGOs, the Sardar Sarovar dam represented the epitome of ill-conceived Bank projects. NGO pressure resulted in Bank hesitation to continued financing which influenced India's 1993 decision to withdraw its request for continued Bank funding.

Non-governmental organizations used these specific cases to symbolize the environmental implications of the Bank's activities in general. Publicizing them was part of a larger effort that included presenting Bank officials with assessments of the environmental impact of past loans, mobilizing public pressure directly on the Bank, building alliances with sympathetic staffers at the Bank, lobbying donor governments, and drafting and disseminating proposals for international legislation to set conditions for loan approval (Conca 1996, 109; Wapner 1996, 138-141). NGO activities have had a mixed record of success, although few would argue that they have been completely ineffective. The Bank has increased the number of staffers focusing on environmental issues; an environmental consultant is now part of the Bank

¹⁰ For an interesting discussion on the limits of conditionality on borrower states related to environmental issues, see Ross 1996.

¹¹ Many of these groups joined forces in the early 1990s under the banner "Fifty Years is Enough Campaign." This organization, made-up of a loose coalitions of NGOs, was established to criticize the Bank during its fiftieth anniversary celebrations throughout the mid-1990s. At present, FYE has full-time staff members and continues to engage the Bank on development and environmental issues.

President's internal cabinet (Maurice Strong, Secretary General of UNCHE and UNCED); and the Bank now regularly funds sustainable development projects with a strict environmental focus. Given the central role the World Bank plays in global economic affairs and development, the ability of NGOs partially to shape the Bank's appreciation of environmental issues should be seen as sign of successful NGO political activity.

Another example of NGOs targeting the economic realm, in contrast to the strictly governmental one, is the NGO effort to hold corporations accountable to the general public. There is a long tradition of conceptualizing the economy as embedded in society (Polanyi 1957). That is, society itself--constituted by people understanding themselves as citizens as opposed to consumers or producers--has often been seen as primary in social ontology. Much critical thinking in the modern age has focused on the way in which economic forces have gotten the upperhand in social relations, determining much of the character of collective life. Society is seen by many critical thinkers as now practically embedded in the economy. Environmental NGOs worry about the implications of such a reversal. For them, to the degree the economy dictates social affairs, environmental protection will tend to be neglected as it becomes marginalized under the commitment to profits, economic efficiency and material productivity. NGOs have been working against this by finding ways of constraining corporate activities. Corporations, representing the accumulation of economic power, are key nodes in the global economic system and thus NGOs target them, as well as the institution of the World Bank, to bend and ultimately harness economic forces to advance environmental protection.

One of the more prominent strategies at corporate accountability consists of establishing voluntary codes of conduct that corporations agree to abide by. In recent years, companies such as Levi Strauss, Reebok, J.C. Penny and Wal-Mart have agreed to eliminate prison and child labor in their operations throughout the world. These agreements were initiated and are being monitored by labor and development NGOs (Broad 1995). A similar effort has taken place with regard to environmental issues. The most well-known was established in 1989 by the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES). The CERES Principles provide concrete criteria against which corporations can strive to improve their environmental record and against which activist groups and citizens can evaluate corporate environmental performance. The code calls on companies to, among other things, minimize pollution, conserve nonrenewable resources through efficient use and planning, and consider demonstrated environmental commitment as a factor in appointing members to the company's board of directors. The code has been embraced by at least one Fortune 500 company and a number of multinational corporations. Sun Company, General Motors, Polaroid, and a host of other multi-national companies have pledged compliance or are at least seriously considering doing so. The effort to enlist companies in the CERES Principles (formerly known as the 'Valdez Principles,' inspired by the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill) is an attempt by NGOs to work directly with corporations and find ways of holding them accountable for the impact they have on the environment (Ann-Zondorak 1991; Broad 1995). It represents another strategy of directly engaging the economic dimension of world collective life.

Environmental NGOs participate in the corporate accountability movement because it represents a way to guide corporate forces toward more environmentally sound types of practices. To be sure, the movement has not changed the essential character of corporate life nor has it even, it is safe to say, resulted in significant changes that can be easily traced back to

environmental protection. It has, however, played at the margins of global corporate understandings and practices, and holds promise as small successes might eventuate in large-scale transformations. NGOs are not holding their breath with regard to such promise but they continue to engage corporate activities because they recognize the extreme governing power of economic forces and understand that *any* change in economic affairs will affect global environmental quality.

Actions to Engage Social Mores

Governmental and economic forces clearly shape the way individuals and collectivities live their lives and reproduce themselves. Additionally, it is well-known that social forces--constituted by cultural practices--shape the way people understand themselves and act in the world. A long tradition of social theory reminds us that humans are, seemingly by nature, social animals. On the whole, they seem to need others and, as communitarians well explain, find themselves being partially constituted by social interaction. People adopt ethical and practical orientations toward the world through the socialization process. The result is that they operate in the world informed by the socio-historical context within which they find themselves. NGOs recognize the situated character of human life and, while influenced by it themselves, work to understand how social mores affect human attitudes and behavior toward the environment. Their efforts along these lines lead to adopting a political strategy of social engagement wherein they try to manipulate the forces of socialization.

Environmentalism has been compared to religion and nationalism insofar as it calls for, according to some of its more radical advocates, adopting a certain worldview based on philosophical and emotional foundations as well as scientific ones (Taylor 1995, Deudney 1995). At its most general level, environmentalism can be described as a sensibility that values nature and believes that the quality of life on earth depends upon the well-being of the planet's air, water, soil and so forth. For many environmentalists, environmental protection calls for others to adopt such a sensibility. It involves winning-over or literally converting people to an environmental perspective. So many cultural practices reveal an anti-ecological orientation; people throughout the world do things that degrade the environment because they operate according to traditions or within ideological structures that support anti-ecological practices. Environmental NGOs work to manipulate the factors that constitute such traditions and structures with the aim of producing, as it were, environmental citizens.

In parts of Asia, there is a tradition of ingesting parts certain wild plants and animals to boost one's health. Because of increasing demand, this tradition has been threatening the continued existence of certain species. For example, in East Asia it is widely believed that the bile from bear gall bladders acts as a health restorative, working as an antidote to liver cancer, hemorrhoids and conjunctivitis, as well as promoting general virility. In a grisly form of extraction, China has so-called bear farms where bears live in captivity hooked up to intravenous systems that pull just enough of the bile from their bladders to keep them alive while producing enough to sell. In general, the belief system threatens all bears throughout the region and, due to international smuggling, the world. This is also the case with tiger bones and rhinoceros horns which are thought to promote human health. One result of this belief is that the number of bears, tigers and rhinos throughout the world is decreasing. All Asian species of bears, for instance, are

presently on Appendix One of CITES and, smuggling bears from other countries is endangering North and South American bear populations (Traffic 1997a.)

Environmental NGOs work to reduce the demand for bears, tigers and rhinos by engaging international regimes. One of their more important efforts, already mentioned, is to increase compliance with CITES. Stopping the trafficking of endangered species at national borders represents a key way to protect bears and other species. NGOs recognize, however, that no matter how stringent international regimes are, if cultural practices still support exploitation of endangered species, bears, tigers and rhinos (as well as numerous other species) will be at risk. As a result, NGOs try directly to change cultural practices. Worldwide Fund for Nature, for instance, has begun a dialogue with consumers and medical practitioners throughout East Asia to alter the way they understand endangered species and the necessity of using such species for medicinal purposes. This has involved, in my view, a contradictory strategy of, on the one hand, trying simply to reacculturate people to different understandings of health and the use of wild plants and animals, and, on the other, convincing medical practitioners and consumers of the benefits of synthetic substitutes. The first involves changing the ideational context within which traditional eastern medicine operates; the second entails accommodating that tradition through technological intervention (Traffic 1997a,b). Both represent, however, the attempt to engage the social dimension of collective life.

One need not go to the East to discover the impact of social forces on environmental affairs. All cultures are animated by widespread understandings that support anti-ecological activities and, in an increasingly interdependent world where cultural forms are penetrating societies the world over, social forces are animating much anti-ecological practices across the globe. NGOs work to change social forces in general that they deem to be anti-ecological. One of the more obvious efforts along these lines is the on-going campaign to endear certain animals to people so as to inspire people not to want to consume them--as clothing, food and so forth--but to value their preservation in the wild. The most well-known of these campaigns are arguably the efforts to protect whales and harp seals. For years, whales were seen as simply another resource to be used for human consumption. For the most part, they were hunted for food and oil. Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Sea Shepherds Conservation Society, WWF and others have worked for years trying to change this image. Through photographs, films and audio recordings, they have portrayed whales as a special species deserving not only protection but respect. NGOs have advertised whales' evident intelligence, gentleness, and unique vocalizations now known as whale 'songs.' Due in large measure to NGO efforts, whales have assumed a mystical character in many people's minds (Day 1989, 52). Such a view led to acts such as 'Operation Rescue,' wherein a \$5 million effort was waged to save three whales trapped in ice in Alaska (Rose 1989).

A similar campaign was waged to protect baby harp seals in northern Canada. For years, there was an annual harp seal hunt in Canada that garnered hundreds of thousands of pure white pelts from newborn seals. Starting in the late 1960s, a host of NGOs including the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Greenpeace, Sea Shepherds Conservation Society and others focused attention on the hunt and tried to portray it as inhumane. Their main strategy was to personify the pups by photographing individual seals and representing them as cute, helpless victims. In the context of such personification, NGOs documented the brutal act of clubbing and skinning

new borns (often in full view of mother seals). Seal pups are, like whales, 'charismatic mega-fauna,' that is, large species which can be portrayed as having special qualities that enable people to extend to them care, concern and simply relatedness (Wenzel 1991; Day 1989). NGOs played on this quality and worked to enhance it. (NGO efforts worked, among other things, to dissuade customers from purchasing coats made out of the pelts, a move that reduced the European market considerably and made the seal trade essentially unprofitable (Wapner 1996, 66).

NGO attempts to portray animals in a particular manner or reacculturate the way people understand the health benefits of ingesting wild animals are attempts to isolate and manipulate cultural formations. They aim to change the way societies understand human relations with non-human species and thus alter the socio-historical context within which people operate as they interact with the environment. The implicit understanding behind such a strategy is that socio-cultural structures are somewhat autonomous from economic and governmental forces--or at least are able to be engaged directly--and thus represent worthy political targets. NGOs recognize, in other words, the governing capability of social structures and see their work as demanding political engagement with them.

Dialectics by Way of Conclusion and Qualification

This essay has tried analytically to circumscribe three spheres of collective life that NGOs target to advance environmental protection. It has presented these spheres as unproblematic insofar as they have been portrayed in essentialist terms. It should be remembered, however, that these spheres are not autonomous but overlap and, indeed, constitute each other. Governmental life, for example, at the domestic and international levels, is not separate or immune from economic and social dynamics. Rather, in many ways, it mirrors the qualities and patterns of economic and social activity. This is also the case with economic and social structures: they are infused with qualities that originate, or at least find their greatest articulation, in the activities and imperatives of the state and the state-system. The idea here is that the three spheres I outlined are in dialectical relation to each other. They are *related* to each other as opposed to being self-subsisting entities with circumscribed properties, and they have numerous contradictory tendencies within them as opposed to being homogeneous realms of given character. It is in this later regard, by the way, that environmental NGOs can, in fact, engage them. If governmental, economic and social forces completely supported anti-ecological practices, NGO efforts would be in vain. Openings in the system arise from contradictions; NGOs work the contradictions.

Appreciating the dialectical character of governmental, economic and social relations, allows for a clearer explication of environmental NGO strategies. Environmental NGOs see themselves as committed to environmental protection. They seek to ensure the quality of the earth's air, water, soil and species. So committed, they care little in principle about what routes to pursue when seeking environmental protection; they wish only to advance the cause.¹² The routes to environmental protection are many because the character of world political life is complex. The international system, as it were, is constituted not simply by the state-system but

¹² This is not to say that NGOs are unconcerned with *how* they undertake political action. Most environmental NGOs are committed, for example, to non-violent activities. See generally Taylor 1996.

by economic and social forces that animate widespread behavior. The world, as it were, is governed by multiple sources of rule. (Indeed, it is even somewhat unfair, from an analytical perspective, to circumscribe governmental, economic and social forces as related realms and posit them as the most significant. As researchers well-know, multiple forms of control, regulation, administration and so forth exist that stabilize human life and condition understanding and action. Nonetheless, it often helps to delineate certain 'permanences' (Harvey 1996) to identify categories of social analysis, even if one recognizes that these are simply convenient categories rather than concrete empirical realities.) Environmental NGOs target each of these realms, then, as a realistic political strategy. They work for political change and thus find themselves targeting multiple realms that govern human interaction with the non-human world.

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