

# ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

Tactical Conflicts Over NAFTA

MICHAEL DREILING

BRIAN WOLF

University of Oregon

*The authors introduce the study of material-organizational dependencies into research on political differences in the environmental movement. Presently, the study of disparities in the environmental movement focuses on the ideological differences among major environmental groups to the exclusion of some very glaring discrepancies in the material-organizational context of these groups. The authors present a conceptual model of organizational differences among several U.S. environmental movement organizations to explain variation in their political behavior in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) fight (1991-1993). The case of NAFTA offers a useful context given the volatility of environmental movement politics at the time, the range of issues forced to the surface in major groups, and the ultimate movement split that the politics over NAFTA engendered. It is evident that the split between pro-NAFTA and anti-NAFTA environmental groups stems in large part from substantial differences in both the ideological frames and material-organizational alliances formed among these groups.*

**T**he environmental movement in the United States and elsewhere is far from a homogenous group of activists, organizations, and ideology. Deep fissures consign committed activists and communities to separate isles in a sea of ecological ideologies and political practices. The split is evident throughout the history of the movement. Punctuated moments of political change and contention make these fractures in the movement all the more evident. For instance, the decade-long battle over the Hetch-Hetchy dam in the 1890s signified diverging tactics, goals, and ideals between the poles of preservationism and resource conservationism (Nash, 1967). More recently, such a split marked the arrival of a militant ecocentric forest defense movement. Disillusioned with the conventional politics in the Wilderness Society during the mid- to late-1970s, Dave Foreman and colleagues left the mainstream to build “a harder-nosed approach” (Malanowski, 1987, p. 568) to wilderness preservation: Thus was born Earth First!

A decade later, another split became apparent when environmental justice and antitoxics activists convened the 1991 People of Color Environmental Justice Sum-

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Authors' Note: *This article has been a joint effort, and the authors' names are listed alphabetically. The authors express appreciation for comments on an earlier draft of this article from two anonymous Organization & Environment reviewers and the coeditor, John Bellamy Foster. Direct correspondence to Michael Dreiling, Department of Sociology, 1291 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1291; e-mail: dreiling@darkwing.uoregon.edu.*



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mit, again challenging the mainstream. Then, between 1991 and 1993, environmentalists of all stripes took part in a struggle over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In the course of this struggle, environmental groups engaged in perhaps the most important “internecine squabble in a century” (Dowie, 1995), splitting the movement between pro-NAFTA and anti-NAFTA coalitions. In this article, we examine the “squabble” between pro-NAFTA and anti-NAFTA environmental groups to substantiate a framework for conceptualizing this recurring fissure in the environmental movement.

Our immediate objective for this article is to highlight the relative inattention paid to material-organizational forces in the literature pertaining to differences in the environmental movement. The strong emphasis placed on discursive-ideological factors in scholarly accounts of the U.S. environmental movement is appraised, although found insufficient. We consequently stress the need to include in any analytical model of environmental movement dynamics the role of material-organizational factors. The apparent invisibility of material-organizational factors in the study of environmental movement organizations (EMOs) is not simply a symptom of disciplinary shortsightedness either; historical conditions that affect the visibility of some parts of the environmental movement are partly responsible. We consequently consider this condition as well.

Second, we review theoretical approaches pertaining to the role of organization and culture in social movements. The resource mobilization and political process theories direct our attention to the sources of financial support and political access that can influence both the structure and practices of social movement organizations (SMOs). These material-organizational factors can have a critical effect on the goals and strategies that movement organizations adopt. Next, we consider the broad grouping of social movement theory that addresses the identity and framing practices of SMOs to assess the impacts that different cultural practices may have on political behavior. Specifically, we assume, along with many of our colleagues, the widely held position that key differences in discursive-ideological practices exist between various wings of the environmental movement. Our treatment of this literature serves as an important foundation for building an analytical model for studying the political dynamics of EMOs in a manner that includes both material-organizational and discursive-ideological dimensions.

Finally, our framework is fully explored using the case of the NAFTA conflict wherein we examine the discourse and material-organizational relationships associated with the splits between numerous environmental groups. The case of NAFTA, we find, is extremely useful given the volatility of environmental movement politics at the time, the wide range of issues it forced to the surface in major groups, and the ultimate movement split that the politics over NAFTA engendered. The case study makes it evident that the split between pro-NAFTA and anti-NAFTA environmental groups stems in large part from substantial differences in both the ideological frames and material-organizational alliances formed among these groups.

## ENVIRONMENTALISM AND POLITICAL ACTION

Environmentalists repeatedly face a tough dilemma: an ongoing escalation of ecological crises amid a restrictive political system for remedying these crises. As both movement activists and scholars are aware, what makes for effective political strategy is partly dependent on the quantity and kind of resources one can bring to political action. Grassroots mobilization versus political lobbying, for instance,

stems from differential social locations and access to types of movement resources, each of which is likely to influence strategies and tactics. Likewise, *coherence* in political strategy is partly derived from the mixture of these resources as well as the ideological and “cultural toolkits” that activists bring to bear on the political environment (Swidler, 1995). Ideological frameworks that treat, for example, environmental problems as essentially wildlife preservation will likely rest at ease in the proliferation of urban environmental problems confronting poor people; although they may find supportive financial resources from upper-middle-class communities (see Buttel & Flinn, 1978; Harry, Gale, & Hendee, 1969). How groups attempt to solve the problem of effective and coherent ecological politics—and the consequences of that action—is thus both materially and culturally bound.

Yet, many scholarly accounts of differences in the environmental movement have adopted a bias toward the ideological sources of difference. One reason for this bias may be a result of viewing the environmental movement through the lens of new social movement theory, which emphasizes the cultural aspects of identity in social movements. Similarly, the extensive research on environmental attitudes that proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s presented both the empirical accounts of the range of environmental beliefs and movement support but also honed the parameters of environmental sociology around attitudinal and demographic analysis (Mitchell, Dunlap, & Mertig, 1992). Direct questions concerning mobilization structures were comparatively absent.

Another reason for the apparent bias in the literature toward exclusively ideological factors stems from the fact that for most of the 20th century, the most visible and lasting parts of the environmental movement were in the preservationist and conservationist groups. The historical literature on these movement tendencies has highlighted the ideological differences in part because the material circumstances between the two are quite similarly located in elite and upper-middle-class social bases (Hayes, 1959; Nash, 1982; Paehlke, 1989). In contrast, the persistent efforts of grassroots environmental activists—for public health, consumer safety, native rights and sovereignty, and worker safety and health—over the course of 150 years remain relatively invisible in the historical accounts of environmentalism (Foster, 1994). This is not because their identities are not “environmentalist” but because their material base was rooted in local, rural, or working-class communities. The apparent invisibility of those environmental movement tendencies is perhaps best explained by their lack of enduring movement resources that could sustain movement organizations analogous to those found in elite preservationist and conservationist communities. Long-term organizational survival was limited by material circumstances, not ideological coherence.

Recent research on the differences in political approaches among major players in the environmental movement, however, remains focused on the ideological, attitudinal, and discursive characteristics of the organizations (see Brulle, 1996; Dryzek, 1997; Eder, 1996; Paehlke, 1989). In this research, Brulle (1996), Dryzek (1997), and others made contributions to our understanding of the development of different clusters of EMOs with analyses of “environmental discourses.” Likewise, the numerous historical and philosophical accounts of conservationism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, and preservationism provide very important foundations for understanding the roots of modern environmentalist discourse. As for the grassroots movements, scholars of environmental justice and antitoxics activism have noted the social structural and organizational constraints faced by grassroots activists, especially those under the influence of gender, race, and class on movement outcomes (Bullard, 1990; Capek, 1993; Krauss, 1989; Taylor, 1992, 1997).

Explicitly organizational analyses within this literature are hard to find. To be sure, great strides have been made in the account of the diverse voices and representations of ecological struggles. But there remains a need to supplement these accounts with the tools of organizational research to appreciate the role of material-organizational factors in shaping the form and political expression of environmentalism.

### **SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY: POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY, ORGANIZATION, AND IDENTITY**

For modern environmental movement actors, the first task for effecting political change begins by scanning the political environment for opportunities and constraints to act. As activists and ecocrats alike venture into the world of politics, the field of combat presents an array of possible allies and opponents, resources, public sympathies to which to appeal, and legal-institutional frameworks on which contest can unfold. How an activist, indeed, how EMOs and entire movements perceive opportunities and constraints in a political environment will shape their type and course of action. Social movement scholars are well aware of these external “limiting factors” on movement action. For instance, when activists note the co-optation of a previously powerful and respected ally or dissension among elites over their cause *celebre*, they are likely to consider the former a constraint and the latter an opportunity. In its totality, McAdam (1999), Tarrow (1989), and others refer to these external factors as the political opportunity structure. These conditions should not be seen as direct causes for movement action but rather as cues that signal movement actors toward possible venues for action. Elements of the political environment that induce movement expectations of success and failure consequently provide incentives for various courses of action.

At this point, it is probably apparent that cues from the political environment will be received in a different way by the various movement organizations and communities that make up a movement. But what prompts a movement activist, or indeed, entire movement sectors, to respond to changing political environments? And what compels groups and organizations that receive similar political cues to act along divergent courses? As we have seen, theory and research on social movements is ripe with the notion that political opportunity structures provide cues to political actors concerning potential courses of (in)action (McAdam, 1999; Tarrow, 1998). But what sensitizes political actors to the obviously broad array of cues that political environments send? How an EMO responds to cues in the political world is shaped by conditions internal to specific organizations and communities of the movement. Factors ranging from a group’s goals, their preferred tactics, and their preferred allies will likely define the lens through which political opportunities and constraints are read.

At this point, it is thus important to consider how characteristics of the movement organization influence political strategy and movement action. Two often contending theoretical camps have emerged to explain the political behavior of EMOs and social movements in general.

### **ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

Resource mobilization theory developed in response to the failure of traditional social-psychological approaches to explain the sustained insurgencies and movements during the 1960s and 1970s. Because of the presumed relative constancy of grievances in a society, it is only with the creation of an SMO that these complaints

can be transformed into a social change agenda. McCarthy and Zald (1977), fore-runners in the promulgation of this perspective, stress that the success of an SMO is directly related to a group's capacity to obtain movement-enhancing resources, all while competing with other interests for those resources. Only then can significant political influence be achieved. As a result, modern SMOs are viewed as rational political actors that seek resource-rich allies to effectively interact with the established state system (Knoke, 1990). Resource mobilization theorists thereby study the processes by which a community pools and directs movement resources for social change (Jenkins, 1989).

However, as movement organizations secure these resources, a critical organizational problem develops. According to the key tenets of the perspective, as external resources are secured, the accountability of organizational leaders shifts away from active members and toward key financial benefactors. Large donors, such as corporations, foundations, and government agencies, may then begin to wield even greater influence over the agenda of the SMO. At the same time, the SMO professional leadership may begin to prioritize survival and growth over movement objectives, leading to a more moderate, if not conservative, political approach to social and environmental change. As these processes of organizational change persist, direct involvement on the part of movement members may wane as organizational control shifts upward and citizens perceive, however falsely, that their interests are being pursued (Jenkins, 1989). The proliferation of mass-marketing strategies, as well as magazines and other material incentives, serves to anchor this perception.

Thus, at the most basic level, resource mobilization and political process theorists direct our attention to the role of material resources in the development of movement action. The material-organizational context of movement organizations will likely shape structures of authority within the organization, which allies are sought, and what types of action are seen as the most fitting response to the circumstances. Because the manner in which resources are obtained shapes movement action in this manner, it is also a critical factor in explaining how movement organizations respond to and perceive cues from their political environment.

### **DISCURSIVE IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND FRAMING**

A variety of social movement theorists employ a cultural constructivist framework to understand the role of discourse, identity, and ideology in how movement actors define problems, frame goals and demands, and shape strategic alignments with publics. This "cultural turn" in movement literature began to proliferate—as it did in much of the humanities and social sciences—in response to claims that resource mobilization studies neglected the processes through which people and movement organizations attribute meaning to events and interpret various situations. This theoretical development arose because of the assumption held among resource mobilization and structuralist scholars that grievances arose with relative constancy in modern capitalist societies. The manner in which human actors identified and mobilized a definition of a "social or environmental grievance" thus could not be appreciably linked to the concepts of social movement and SMO.

Scholars in the United States and throughout Europe responded with an array of new approaches. Touraine (1977), Castells (1983), Melucci (1985), and others defined what became known as a new social movement perspective, focusing on conflicts over the cultural terrain of modern social institutions. These scholars directed attention to the role of ideology and identity in aligning movement activists to contending cultural representations of deep social rifts. Much of these Euro-

pean contributions coincided with developments in the United States. McAdam's (1999) resurrection of the concept of "cognitive praxis" pointed to the study of liberation discourses and identities. Perhaps the most widely applied concept developed during this "cultural turn" in social movement studies came from Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford (1986). Their concept of frame alignment describes how the cognitive background of individuals and the ideological frame of a movement organization are connected. This approach seeks to explain not only the message that a movement communicates to its adherents but to various publics, allies, and opponents as well.

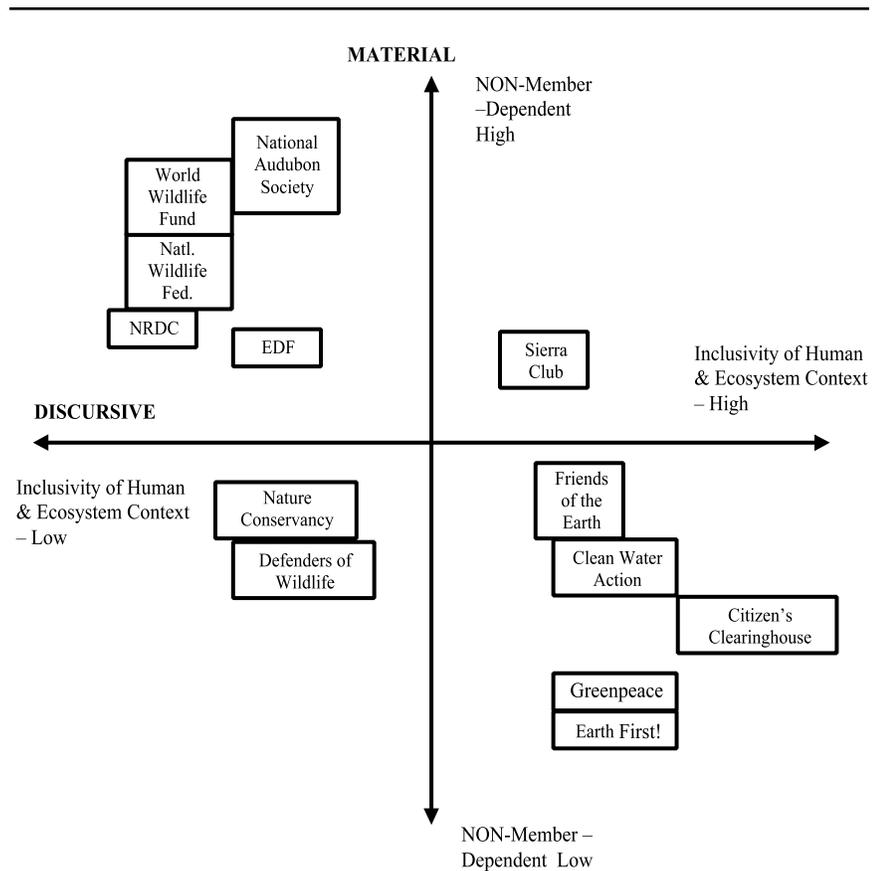
Discursive frames and movement identity also shape the development of internal characteristics of movement organizations. Because a particular discursive practice and frame may legitimate some actions while delegitimizing others, the manner in which an EMO acquires resources and acts politically is related to its movement identity. As scholars from numerous theoretical persuasions acknowledge, this identity influences organizational structure (Voss, 1993), resource acquisition (Knoke, 1990), and the tactics of the organization (Benford & Hunt, 1992).

These tools can be readily used to understand the discursive practices of actors in the environmental movement. Ideological and discursive factors of movement organizations shape the manner in which nonhuman nature is conceived, the meaning of environmental problems, their relation to human social institutions, and a prognosis for change. It is in the "modes of attribution and articulation" (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137) that difference in political identity will affect how environmentalists engage other political actors and status quo social institutions. Thus, how EMOs construct environmental problems and how their underlying movement identity is represented are influential forces shaping movement dynamics (Kaczmarek & Cooperrider, 1997). Needless to say, there is a considerable range of environmentalist identities, which in turn shape how movement actors frame various ecological problems—indeed, even so far as defining what counts as an ecological problem and who or what is responsible.

### A POLITICAL PROCESS SYNTHESIS

Our brief review of this literature has shown that resource mobilization theory and various cultural theories emphasize two distinct analytical conditions shaping the behavior of movement organizations. Resource mobilization theory directs our attention to the role of organizational and resource dependencies as conditions that influence political action and the selection of allies. On the other hand, theorists from the cultural school of thought stress the role of discursive frames, identity, and ideology in shaping the meaning of ecological problems. We believe that the inclusion of both theoretical orientations is necessary in this study to underscore the divergent responses of EMOs to NAFTA. Using this basic framework, we classify the EMO actors involved in the NAFTA fight according to the character of their organizational and resource dependencies and the level at which an EMO embraces an ecological context.

The modern environmental movement is a complex mix of organizations, communities, and cultures. Scholars have attempted to classify the various wings and "waves" of the movement for several decades now. The simplest distinctions pose the movement as split between conservationist and preservationist wings. Others add animal rights to this model (Adams, 1990). And still others bring in constructs that include ecofeminism, environmental justice, indigenous ecology, deep ecology, wise use, and even ecotheology. Some have also conceptualized the movement



**FIGURE 1: Two-Dimensional Model of Environmental Movement Organizations**

Note: See Table 1 for information on sources of membership support and ecological identity.

in terms of the development of various waves of environmentalism, each bound by the historical and political conditions facing ecology and community (Dowie, 1995; Dryzek, 1997; Merchant, 1992). These latter efforts are perhaps the most fruitful in that they incorporate an understanding of movement development to the unfolding grid between capitalism and ecology. Their focus is on varieties and dimensions of environmentalism, not necessarily the politics of EMOs. Consequently, these approaches do not make explicit an analytical framework for thinking about the dynamics of EMOs.

Figure 1 presents a framework for locating EMOs along both discursive-ideological and material-organizational dimensions. This two-dimensional map produces four general quadrants on which to locate individual EMOs.<sup>1</sup> Our vertical dimension traces the extent to which an EMO depends financially on its membership base. Groups that rely heavily on membership dues and volunteer time will be located in one of the lower two quadrants of the figure, whereas groups that rely heavily on external sources of financial support through corporations or foundations will be located in one of the two upper quadrants of the graph. Greenpeace, for example, relies heavily on membership dues and support and will thus be placed in the lower half of the figure. Furthermore, because Greenpeace adopts a fairly inclusive ecological identity, it falls in the lower-right-hand quadrant. The use

of the horizontal dimension allows us to position groups not only by their material-organizational dependencies but also by their ecological identity. Groups that are highly inclusive of the human and ecosystem context are placed in the far-right sector of the graph, whereas groups that are very exclusive in their ecological identity are placed in the far-left sector of the graph.

The second dimension focuses on the discursive elements of the organization, which we take to include political identity and cultural framing practices. Along this dimension, EMOs vary by the relative expansiveness of their identification with a social and ecological context. We use four basic categories to designate the ecological identities of the respective groups (see Table 1). The four categories are conservationist, preservationist, ecocentric, and environmental justice/antitoxics. Our characterizations maintain considerable consistency with the self-proclaimed identity of each group. At one end of the spectrum are environmental justice/antitoxics groups that generally embrace a more inclusive vision of society and ecology. At the other end are conservation groups that advocate natural resource conservation and wise use of resources and work with a much less inclusive social and ecological identity. Issues concerning the quality of urban habitat for humans, for instance, are not found in the discursive frames of these EMOs. Groups identifying as either preservationist or ecocentric fall in between these two poles.

EMOs that embrace a highly inclusive ecological identity will act differently than groups with a less inclusive ecological identity, all else being equal. For instance, EMOs embracing the less inclusive conservationist identity will not likely respond to a political opportunity for changing community and workplace health and safety standards.

We also believe that these two dimensions shape the general organizational structure and behavior of EMOs.<sup>2</sup> EMOs that are highly member dependent, for example, are expected to react differently to movement opportunities than those dependent on institutional sources of funding. EMOs with a high dependency on their membership for resources will stress mobilization tactics that rely on those member resources; they are likely to be very grassroots centered. Consequently, their organizational structure will reflect these material demands as well. For example, Earth First!, which is highly dependent on member resources and commitments, uses tactics and in ways that are substantially different from the Washington, D.C.-based preservationist groups. For Earth First!, this translates into a decentralized organizational structure, the absence of Washington, D.C., headquarters, and a low number of employed professionals. Furthermore, this provides a greater propensity to act contentiously and engage in innovative tactical activities when threats to the environment arise. In contrast, EMOs that rely on outside allies or resource-rich organizations will tend to adopt mobilization tactics and organizational structures amenable to the interests of their resource partners. They will consequently possess leadership structures and organizational headquarters that facilitate working with their elite partners.

Based on our model, we postulate that movement organizations that endorsed NAFTA were also more likely to receive heavy support from institutionalized sources, such as corporations, foundations, and the government. Reflecting the status quo interests of these supporters, their ecological identity will tend to be less inclusive and their political behavior consequently less contentious. The EMOs clustered in the upper-left quadrant of Figure 1 are likely candidates for supporting NAFTA. Conversely, EMOs clustered in the lower-right quadrant of Figure 1 are likely to be strong opponents to NAFTA. They receive more grassroots support from members and tend to align with a broader spectrum of ideas, representative of

**Table 1: Depicting Environmental Movement Organizations' (EMOs') Reliance on Support From Members and Ties of Each EMO to Executive Cabinets and Major Corporations by Support for NAFTA**

<i>EMO</i>	<i>Environmental Philosophy</i>	<i>Percentage Funds Member<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Ties to Clinton Administration</i>	<i>Ties to Bush Administration</i>	<i>Ties to Corporations</i>	<i>Support NAFTA</i>
Defenders of Wildlife	Preservationist	70	0	1	0	Yes
Environmental Defense Fund	Market conservationist	49 <sup>b</sup>	3	3	3	Yes
National Audubon Society	Preservationist	15 <sup>b</sup>	3	2	3	Yes
National Wildlife Federation	Conservationist	47	2	1	14	Yes
Natural Resource Defense Council	Market conservationist	61 <sup>b</sup>	1	2	0	Yes
Nature Conservancy	Classical conservationist	62 <sup>b</sup>	1	1	6	Yes
World Wildlife Federation	Preservationist	48 <sup>b</sup>	3	2	10	Yes
Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste	Antitoxics/ environmental justice	80	0	0	0	No
Clean Water Action	Antitoxics/ environmental justice	98	0	0	0	No
Earth First!	Ecocentric	99	0	0	0	No
Friends of the Earth	Preservationist	63	0	0	0	No
Greenpeace	Preservationist/ environmental justice	98	0	0	0	No
Sierra Club	Preservationist	40	0	2	2	No

Source: Audley (1995).

Note: Information on ties to corporations through board members and presidential administrations through election campaigns in 1992.

a. We recognize that the "percentage funds from member" is only an approximate indicator of member dependency. Each organization has a multitude of revenue sources ranging from sales of calendars and books to membership dues, foundation grants, and corporate contributions. The Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society both admittedly receive a large portion of their nonmember revenues from the sales of products and services associated their group logo and history. Audubon's books and calendars, as with the Sierra Club's books and Ansel Adams photography lines, among other things, provide important revenue for these groups. Some sensitivity to these figures can be appreciated in our consideration of the individual organizations.

b. 1999 Annual Report.

a demanding membership facing challenges to various social and ecological problems. Their movement tactics will likely be less constrained and more readily confrontational and contentious. The result of this logical relationship is that the political strategy and action of EMOs reflect the interests and ideology of those funding the EMO. For this reason, we propose that the EMOs that vigorously challenged NAFTA also embraced a more inclusive ecological identity than EMOs that support conservation and wise-use policies. The material-organizational dependencies and ecological identities thus shape and guide the strategy and behavior of the movement organization. In the next section, we explore this model in the context of conflict among EMOs over NAFTA.

## EXPLAINING POLITICS AROUND NAFTA

Why did some EMOs come out in support of NAFTA, and why did others oppose it? We suspect that the political difference among EMOs over NAFTA and trade issues is related to both how they frame issues facing the environment and what material resource an EMO relies on for support. In this case, neither is more important than the other is, nor does one presuppose the other, but instead, each coexists with the other, and they act as dual forces in producing an organizational response to a political opportunity. Employing our model encompassing both discursive and material factors, we have formed a method of analysis that examines the dynamic interplay between political discourses used by EMOs and material dependencies among them in the course of conflict over NAFTA. We find that it is also valuable to look at organizational structures and internal conflicts within EMOs as the NAFTA debate played out, where movement alliances were formed, and the role of politics inside the Beltway.

### *Framing Trade and the Environment*

The discursive practices of environmental groups on both sides of the NAFTA debate are quite revealing of substantial differences in ecological identities. For example, on the pro-NAFTA side, conservationist groups “talk” repeatedly of the role of markets in creating sustainability. However, on the anti-NAFTA side, groups “talk” about the threat that NAFTA and corporate domination pose for democracy and environmental justice. These examples point still further to the cognitive bridge that EMO discursive frames form with larger ideologies concerning free-market capitalism, globalization, and democracy.

By the early 1990s, many critics of laissez-faire and free trade raised concerns that the unfettered expansion of capital around the world was leading to serious environmental problems. Among these critics were scientists, activists, academics, and others who argued that a profit-driven economy was negligent to diverse ecological systems. These criticisms sparked a debate, and neoliberal business interests responded with an elaborate public relations campaign to “greenwash” their business practices (Athanasίου, 1996). Rather than dismissing claims that the environment is at serious risk, neoliberal business interests enlisted the help of conservation groups to actually promote the idea that free trade and the expansion of markets is actually what is needed to help “save” the environment. These alignments resulted in a growing congruence in the discursive frames of corporations, foundations, and business-friendly environmental groups around an ideology that defines free markets and economic rationality as what is best for the environment. Statements that espouse the virtues of “sustainable development,” resource management, scientific management, and corporate responsibility deflect questions about the effect of an unregulated market on the environment. This is a discourse in many ways consistent with traditional conservationist agendas framed as a “gospel of efficiency” (Hayes, 1959).

Conservation and business groups tend to stress the importance of the “synergy” that can be made with environmental issues and business interests as if environmental interests and business interests necessarily complement one another (Hawken, 1998). The discourse of synergy is apparent in efforts to support free-trade initiatives like NAFTA. When National Wildlife Federation (NWF) President Jay Hair said, “The NAFTA package promises to be a powerful tool in *harnessing economic*

*resources* in the name of *environmental protection* [italics added],” he was communicating more than a pro-NAFTA argument (NWF, 1993). He was also drawing an association between an ecological identity of conservationism and a market ideology that business autonomy and economic rationality is what is best to protect the planet. Any policy that does not augment business interests is at the same time a threat to “resource conservation.” This idea was echoed in a concurring statement released by the Environment Committee of the U.S. Council for International Business (1992), stating that “it is important to avoid any environment measures that would pose trade barriers, thereby defeating the original purposes and the opportunity for environmentally beneficial economic growth NAFTA could afford” (p. 2). These carefully crafted statements reflect a discursive frame that aligns a conservationist identity with the capitalist ideology that unfettered capital can save the planet. In framing the threats to the environment as a problem to be solved by business and free markets, EMO supporters of NAFTA consequently aligned a frame that resonated with status quo corporate ideology.

A review of the press releases, statements, and “fact sheets” issued by EMOs in support of NAFTA shows these common themes in promoting the NAFTA package. When issuing statements in favor of NAFTA, strategic rhetorical devices were commonly used to preempt, counter, or reject claims that NAFTA poses any threat to the environment. These statements often went on to explain how the expansion of trade in North America and across the world is actually a benefit to the environment as a whole. This idea is reflected in a statement issued by USA\*NAFTA (1993) arguing, “The NAFTA will promote a number of vital U.S. economic interests, while providing unprecedented safeguards for environmental protection.” The corporate coalition also added in television, newspaper, and other mass media campaigns that “NAFTA is the ‘greenest’ trade agreement ever negotiated. It commits the signatories to the principle of ‘sustainable’ development.” Again, this statement uses “economic interests” and “environmental protection” synonymously while assuring that the environment will ultimately be better off via the neoliberal notion of sustainable development. In essence, conservation groups and neoliberal interests were pushing the same slogan that NAFTA equals sustainable development.

Conservation groups like the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC) took this opportunity to argue that with adequate funding and the increased capital generated by trade, environmental protections would increase on either side of the borders. Although the NRDC was concerned with the initial apparent lack of concern for environmental “safeguards” in the original NAFTA text, it did not come out against NAFTA but instead lobbied to have environmental safeguards written into NAFTA. In a brief presented to the U.S. Trade Office, the NRDC (1992) stated that

the current trade talks offer a unique opportunity to strengthen environmental protection in North America and to set an important precedent for future trade pacts. . . . The challenge will be to further the economic aims of free trade in a way that promotes a healthy environment for current and future generations. (p. 1)

Conservation groups such as the NRDC argued that environmental protections could be integrated into NAFTA while making everybody better off economically. In essence, as the business logic goes, the benefits of increased trade far outweigh the costs of increased environmental oversight, cleanup costs, and any other damage caused to the environment. Here, we see how these discourses are reflective and connected to powerful interests who have a large stake in determining how environmental concerns are framed. Pro-NAFTA EMOs tend to frame the debate around

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Sustainable development  
 Corporate responsibility  
 Resource conservation  
 Free markets

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**FIGURE 2: Box 1.1: Key Discourses Used by Pro-NAFTA Environmental Movement Organizations**

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Just and sustainable development  
 Corporate domination  
 Environmental preservation  
 Democracy

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**FIGURE 3: Box 1.2: Key Discourses Used by Anti-NAFTA Environmental Movement Organizations**

business issues and economic rationality, perpetuating an argument that business-style thinking is the best way to “manage” Earth’s resources.

Boxes 1.1 and 1.2 (see Figures 2 and 3) contrast several important discursive frames associated with groups on each side of the NAFTA argument. Box 1.1 shows the main discourses used by pro-NAFTA groups. In each of these concepts, it is the autonomy of capital that is emphasized, corresponding to the business ideologies of laissez-faire and free trade. In short, the freedom and urgent needs of capital are stressed in these discourses. Environmental problems are diagnosed as resulting from restrictions on capital, and the prognosis advanced urges great opportunities for a corporate volunteerism. The result is the reproduction of a rather exclusive ecological identity centered on markets and economic rationality.

These concerns are of course not new. For well over a century, conservationist ecological identity has actually maintained a conceptual distance from social issues (Gottlieb, 1993; Nash, 1967; Paehlke, 1989). Most large EMOs, through most of this century, have advanced discursive frames around the resource management interests of industry and the concerns of elite and middle-class recreation consumers (Brulle, 1996; Faber & O’Connor, 1993; Gottlieb, 1993). On the other hand, the environmental justice movement “does not treat the problem of oppression and social exploitation as separable from the rape and exploitation of the natural world” (Taylor, 1993, p. 57). For groups embracing an ecological identity of environmental justice/antitoxics, environmental threats induced by free trade and capital mobility are also concern for human welfare.

The anti-NAFTA EMOs thus embraced a more inclusive social and ecological outlook. Box 1.2 shows the key concepts that form an antithesis to those representing the pro-NAFTA discursive frames. In Box 1.2, the concepts of justice, power, inequality, and democracy offered a critical diagnosis of environmental problems, attributed these problems to “corporate domination,” and offered a prognosis in democracy and a “just and sustainable development.” More inclusive of both social causes and ecosystem context, the discursive frames of the anti-NAFTA groups

reflected ideologies more consistent with the broad social movement constituency at the base of the NAFTA opposition.

Charging that NAFTA would undermine environmental laws in the United States and Canada and exacerbate pollution in the South, anti-NAFTA groups sought to bring attention to the antiecological business practices that are brought on under NAFTA and free trade. More radical preservation groups and environmental justice groups warned of the looming threats of NAFTA to ecosystems, people, and democracy while pointing to the contradiction of a green free market. Greenpeace (1993) warned that “because ‘free trade’ means limiting the ability of government to control corporate activity—deregulation in other words—NAFTA will make it much harder for the people we elect to do their job of protecting the environment, our health and public natural resources” (p. 3). These groups believed that the pro-NAFTA lobby had co-opted the notion of sustainable development and distorted its entire meaning around the needs of moneyed interests. In challenging NAFTA’s incorporation of neoliberal notions of sustainable development, Brent Blackwelder, vice president of Friends of the Earth (FOE), saw these attempts to greenwash NAFTA as a wolf in sheep’s clothing:

Rather than protecting the environment for future generations, the Agreement’s [NAFTA] backers have decided the U.S., Mexico, and Canada should first get rich, then use their wealth to clean up. This terrible gamble with the future is nothing less than the environmental equivalent of deficit spending. (FOE, 1992)

Blackwelder also adds, “The Agreement has a ‘green sheen’ but like algae on a pipe, little depth.” These testimonies are attempts to unveil intentions of an agreement that incorporates vague notions of sustainable development to ward off questions about NAFTA’s ability to offer genuine environmental protections. In response to what anti-NAFTA groups saw as a rip-off of the entire meaning of *sustainability*, they reappropriated *sustainable development* and emphasized the need for not simply sustainable development but a *just* and sustainable development as well. The incorporation of this environmental justice frame gave new meaning to the NAFTA fight. The broad base of social movements that opposed NAFTA, including labor and environmentalists, was thus able to forge a discursive frame that expanded calls for justice in all arenas. This environmental justice frame resounded across the ranks of the NAFTA opposition and became a rallying cry for the opposition to NAFTA and united various factions of the environmental movement over the common concern of unregulated free trade. Preservation and environmental justice groups saw free trade as a code word for subverting local and national laws, usurping control of resources from the public, and a *carte blanche* to pollute and destroy the environment in the name of profit. These groups pointed to how NAFTA and other initiatives eroded national sovereignty, took away rights from citizens, and placed greater power and wealth at the hands of corporations. In return for these compromises, the citizens of Canada, Mexico, and the United States could all enjoy all the free-market joys of more toxic food, increased air pollution, global warming, and dirty water, just to name a few. The inclusive ecological identities of the environmental justice frame, and to a lesser extent of ecocentrism and preservationism, thus enabled the incorporation of a wide range of critical subjects into the opposition discourse. Furthermore, these groups constructed a framework that simply could not accept the narrow environmental provisions written into NAFTA. Rather, these environmental provisions could easily be

identified as a smoke screen used to divert attention away from much larger issues dealing with the environment, labor rights, and social justice.

### **MATERIAL-ORGANIZATIONAL DEPENDENCIES AND THE MOVEMENT SPLIT**

As emphasized in our theoretical perspective, we cannot consider the discursive elements of an EMO without considering material factors that shape the organization. These factors include from where an EMO obtains its movement resources, how this influences whom it forms alliances with, and how this shapes the course of political action it pursues. These factors, combined with the aforementioned cultural elements, ultimately shape how an EMO will respond to political cues. To explore this position, we have analyzed the organizational and political ties between EMOs and corporations, as well as their degree of dependence on members for material support.

Table 1 classifies each EMO by its primary ecological identities using a classification schema informed by Brulle's (1996) analysis of environmental groups. This table also shows a rough measure of the EMO's dependence on membership for support, listed here as a percentage of annual total revenue received. The political variables, or ties to the Bush and Clinton administrations, reflect connections to political offices during 1991-1993. The ties to corporations are reflective of director interlocks between the boards of the EMOs and the boards of 20 leading pro-NAFTA corporations. For example, a board member for Exxon also sits on the board of the NWF, representing one director interlock as a tie to a corporation. Similarly, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) had ties to such corporate giants as Philip-Morris, Kodak, and Time-Warner. These ties reflect a bridge between both the organizational identities and the material dependencies of the EMOs and the corporate and political establishment. In return for corporate support, these EMOs may serve as political vehicles for corporations to lobby politicians, shaping environmental policy around the needs and desires of the corporate elite. We see this in the final column indicating whether the EMO supported or opposed NAFTA.

A look at Table 1 reveals results consistent with our general propositions. We see that an EMO's ideology and source of material support correlate with their political behavior over NAFTA. The less inclusive identities of conservation groups are also less dependent on their members for financial support. Furthermore, they consistently have corporate representatives sitting on their board. These EMOs also have ties to Washington elites via the respective presidential administrations, a further reflection of their proximity to the status quo policy apparatus. These groups are the most likely to favor NAFTA and offered support instrumental to NAFTA's passage.

Furthermore, EMOs sharing a similar policy perspective tend to form alliances with each other in pursuing movement goals. These alliances are formed on the basis of similar movement goals but also through organizational-structural similarities in how they obtain resources and who they have ties to in the power elite. Strong ties to political campaigns and director interlocks reflect cohesiveness between the pro-NAFTA groups and ruling elites and policy bodies, a condition that is not found with more member-dependent EMOs. Likewise, differences in the EMO's source of support translated into differences in mobilization strategies. As grassroots, member-dependent organizations were mobilizing members around calls for environmental justice, well-funded conservation groups such as the NRDC, WWF, and Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) were in the process of

forming alliances with the business community and policy groups in Washington to, in effect, greenwash the environmental impacts of NAFTA. The seven conservation and preservation EMOs depicted in Table 1 that supported NAFTA formed the Environmental Coalition for NAFTA.

The major conservationist organizations that moved to support NAFTA, especially the NWF, readily used their access to governmental circles and corporate supporters. The pro-NAFTA groups, as Table 1 indicates, are organizations with close dependency on external revenue, especially corporate moneys. These organizational dependencies stem from their historic role in "rationalizing the field" of environmental politics during the rapidly developing national environmental policy apparatus in the 1970s (Gottlieb, 1993; Sale, 1993). Their success and dominance of environmental politics in the United States during the 1980s stems from a deployment of organizational forms aimed at securing foundation money, boosting relations with power brokers in the Reagan administration, accompanied by tactics emphasizing lobbying and litigation. Prepared to compromise in 1981, the CEOs of the several large EMOs formed the "Group of Ten" (G-10) with the explicit aim of creating a niche in the neoliberal policy agenda under Reagan's executive order. Succumbing to the political dominance of neoliberal capital, the G-10 increasingly leaned to market solutions for environmental regulation, turning nature into "a commodity to be bought and sold" and defining objectives "in terms of their economic value" (Gottlieb, 1993, p. 317). Jay D. Hair—president of the NWF—urged that "our arguments must translate into profits, earnings, productivity, and economic incentives for industry" (quoted in Commoner, 1987, p. 68). As the G-10's defensiveness subsided, overtures to industry became routinized through the boards and funding sources of these organizations (Dowie, 1995; Gottlieb, 1993; Sale, 1993).

The organizational consequences faced by these NAFTA supporters are evident in their strengthened relationship to major corporate donors.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in 1992 the WWF "received \$2.5 million in a single donation from Eastman Kodak, whose C.E.O., Kay Whitmore, is co-founder of USA\*NAFTA," the corporate coalition supporting NAFTA (Cockburn, 1993, p. 895). Direct corporate representation was maintained within the large pro-NAFTA organizations. Kay Whitmore received a seat on the Board of Directors of WWF, and at a more general level, quoting John Audley, "what you see is very clear, the [seven] pro-NAFTA environmental organizations have Boards that are very corporate oriented, or heavy with foundation support, and the anti-NAFTA environmental organizations are much more grassroots oriented, . . . not corporate driven. It's very clear."<sup>4</sup> As indicated in Table 1, the fact that even with such an enormous membership—although largely magazine subscribers—the NWF relies on nonmember contributions for more than half of its funding.

In contrast, the preservation groups had fewer ties to establishment elite and were not as inclined to support NAFTA. A couple of the preservation groups—National Audubon Society and WWF—did support NAFTA, which seems reflective of the lower dependence on members and the relatively strong ties to corporations and Washington. Preservation groups like the Sierra Club and FOE all had few or no ties to establishment elites and did not support NAFTA. Except for the Sierra Club, these groups are very dependent on members for material support. The Sierra Club seems to be the outlier in our model as the group remains less dependent on its members, has a few elite ties, but still came out strongly against NAFTA. Factors internal to the organization of the club, including recent changes, seem to be the source of this outcome.

The recent history of the Sierra Club highlights the unique role that the club has played in environmental movement conflicts like this one. For example, under David Brower's leadership in the 1960s, the Sierra Club adopted increasingly active strategies to prevent the construction of two dams in the Grand Canyon. The tactics and issue were popular among the membership but resulted in a serious administrative fracture leading to the loss of the club's tax-exempt status and the expulsion of Brower, who then formed the FOE, setting FOE tactically to the left of the Sierra Club (Gottlieb, 1993; McCormick, 1989).<sup>5</sup> The loss of tax-exempt status, on one hand, prepared the club for an expansion of its professional capacities by equipping it with the first environmental political action committee during the 1970s expansion of the federal regulations for the environment. On the other hand, in the post-Brower period, a series of conflicts between staff, the board, and several of the large grassroots local chapters "weakened the shift toward centralization and professionalization" (Gottlieb, 1993, p. 150). These internal tendencies mixed with the relatively strong grassroots base of the Sierra Club tilted the organizational trajectory in a direction quite distinct from the other "Big Ten" groups.

This pattern was replayed in the NAFTA conflict. The chair of Sierra Club, Mike McCloskey, and Carl Pope, the executive director, were seen by other Big Green groups, such as the NWF and WWF, as breaking ranks by working with labor unions and the more left-leaning environmental groups against NAFTA. Jay Hair, the president of the NWF, expecting the Sierra Club to swing in support of the NAFTA as six other large groups did, expressed betrayal and anger toward McCloskey and the Sierra Club. Hair commented, "I think the stakes are just too high for people to be into such protectionist polemics as I see coming out of the Sierra Club."<sup>6</sup> Distancing himself, and perhaps the Sierra Club, McCloskey affirmed their opposition: "We are not identifying ourselves in this instance with some of the other so-called mainstream groups and perhaps it does represent a *repositioning* of the Sierra Club."<sup>7</sup>

Yet, these problems never arose for FOE, Greenpeace, or Clean Water Action (CWA). None of these groups were invited to the G-10 meetings during the 1980s and none sought to build extensive ties to the Washington establishment. During the NAFTA conflict, the more inclusive preservationist and environmental justice groups had no ties to elites and were mostly dependent on members for support. These same groups formed some of the strongest critics of NAFTA and remained at the forefront of a broad coalition challenging the neoliberal agenda. A look at Table 1 shows the important role of member dependency in determining these differences. For example, Greenpeace, as the largest direct action group with substantial revenue through member supporters, behaved in ways we would expect. For more than 2 years, Greenpeace was a key player in the internationalist wing of NAFTA opposition. In addition, as Cam Duncan recalls,

In the last 6 months leading up to the NAFTA vote, we were as, if not more, involved in the [Citizen's Trade Campaign]. We had some resources to bear on lobbying, through the mobilizing we had done through the canvas offices to members of congress.<sup>8</sup>

Apparently, the greater dependence on members creates an EMO that is more responsive to changing political opportunities. This is reflected in the power held in their membership base and the ready use of multiple strategies, including grassroots mobilization and direct action, as opposed to an exclusive embrace of the Washington political machine.

The anti-NAFTA groups that embrace an inclusive ecological identity and rely heavily on members brought to the NAFTA conflict a range of member-based resources. The anti-NAFTA efforts of CWA had at their center “the deployment of 350 door-to-door canvassers and hundreds of phone crews which contacted approximately 10,000 voters each day before the NAFTA vote . . . resulting in over 40,000 hand-written letters . . . to the offices of 54 targeted members of Congress.”<sup>9</sup> Like CWA, Greenpeace used their sophisticated canvassing operations at the local level, in addition to highly dramatic direct actions in Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, New York City, and elsewhere. Greenpeace was also able to mobilize an international presence in cities across North America. And like Greenpeace’s internationalism, FOE used its wide network of semiautonomous global affiliates. One such affiliate, the Rainforest Action Network (RAN), reflects FOE’s inclusive ecological identity. RAN represents an innovative quasi-direct-action approach to forest preservation around the globe. In sharp contrast to the less inclusive NWF and its political focus on negotiations with international development agencies, RAN works with indigenous groups for the protection of both “bio-diversity and cultural diversity” from the ravages of development protocols and timber-financed debt obligations.

As each of these cases makes apparent, EMOs acted along fairly structured lines. Ecological identity shaped the framing practices of groups, and the material-organizational dependencies influenced the strategies for political action in relation to NAFTA. The same conditions that shaped the course of their political action will no doubt continue to direct ecological politics throughout North America.

Since the 1994 implementation of NAFTA, critics continue to challenge the NAFTA agenda and its claim to sustainable development. Environmentalists from across North America have “tested” the environmental side accord and found it wanting. Of the 20 cases of alleged nonenforcement of environmental laws submitted to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) by citizens, only 2 have been accepted as record in the United States. Although the first official case against the CEC was accepted—which involved a request to investigate the deaths of some 40,000 waterfowl in a central Mexican reservoir—the ruling by the CEC resulted in nothing more than a report on the deaths of these birds. This report, however, attributed the cause of deaths to botulism and, according to the Grupo de los Cien, downplayed the significance of industrial toxins.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the ruling by the CEC established a precedent that further narrows the scope of review under the CEC, arguing that “failure to enforce” national environmental legislation can only occur through administrative failure, not because the means for enforcement of intact environmental laws were defunded. Critics also maintain that border environmental problems continue to outpace the ability of public health and environmental agencies to develop solutions.<sup>11</sup>

No doubt the biggest confirmation of NAFTA’s threat to the environment came in 1997 when Canada imposed a ban on a gasoline additive MMT, which was also banned in some U.S. states. The Ethyl Corporation, a manufacturer of the additive, sued the Canadian government for \$250 million, claiming that their ban violated its investors’ protections under NAFTA. Canada settled the suit, paid Ethyl \$13 million, paid Ethyl’s legal costs, and revoked its public health law. The opponents of NAFTA saw their greatest concerns realized. An ecological identity scripted by the narrow parameters of conservationism could not have seen such a problem coming. Likewise, an environmental movement that relies excessively on the material support of corporations is not likely to forge a politics capable of addressing the chal-

lenges presented by the Ethyl case. A more inclusive and autonomous ecological practice is needed.

### CONCLUSION

The ongoing splits over political strategy within the environmental movement represent an important challenge to building a politics for a just and sustainable future. The political coherence of environmentalism is not, however, a necessary or even a desirable criteria. But a clearer understanding of the reasons behind the fractious behavior within the movement could certainly bring greater focus and integrity to environmental politics. The same goes for scholarship on the environmental movement. Scholarly accounts of EMOs and their intramovement strife have for the most part focused on the unique philosophies and identities that the various wings of the movement bring to politics. Differences in ecological identity are often considered the source of disagreement among various wings of the movement. Yet, there is good reason to believe that future scholarship on environmental movement politics will find it greatly beneficial to also examine the material and organizational ties of EMOs. A more coherent understanding of the problems and possibilities posed by intramovement conflict may also serve to enrich ecological politics. This concern was expressed in our study.

In our discussion of environmental groups during the NAFTA fight, we have seen that their respective resource base and the inclusiveness of their ecological identity defined the split between several large environmental groups. The split in the movement arose from differences along both discursive-ideological and material-organizational axes. Moreover, it is evident in this case that the cultural and organizational features of EMOs determine their capacity to identify and respond to cues for action/inaction in the political opportunity structure. The choices pursued by leaders of the EMOs will likely reflect the organizational conditions associated with their material and resource dependencies as well as their ecological identities. Knowing these indicators prior to the NAFTA conflict, we believe one could predict, with near certainty, onto which side of the NAFTA debate each group would fall. We also realize that this was a large conflict, exposing deep rifts and assumptions under girding the environmental movement. These conditions cannot be easily replicated. However, comparative research on sustained conflicts within the environmental movement could provide further leverage for assessing the reasons why particular EMOs adopt particular ecological identities and material dependencies. Work by Brulle (1996) has pointed to unique historical context associated with various ecological protest cycles. This work could be expanded to include a more systematic study of not only the discursive frames associated with EMO formation but their material context as well. The divisions in the environmental movement deserve such an exposure.

### NOTES

1. We wish to emphasize from the outset that we are not concerned with explaining why a particular organization adopts one or another position along these two dimensions at any point in time. Nor do we attempt to explain how these forces give shape to the organizational structures in the movement. Explaining why a group fits in a particular quadrant of our model at a particular time involves a complex historical account. Rather, our intention is to propose that these material and discursive dimensions are the proximate causes of variation in the political action and organizational structure of environmental movement organizations

(EMOs). More detailed and comparative historical efforts are required to adequately understand the genesis of particular placements of specific EMOs in these quadrants.

2. We are not theorizing why a particular EMO adopts an ecological identity and material-organizational dependency. Organizational structure, over time, may well determine both. But, we wish to distinguish the proximate causes of EMO political action and the factors that may shape those factors over time. Our model is concerned with the former, and any accounts of the origins of organizational structures in a particular EMO are concerned with the latter. See Hjelmar (1996), Voss (1993), and Brulle (1996) for more discussion on organizational structure.

3. These ties to corporations characterize what Dowie (1995) refers to as the "third wave" of environmentalism, moving the battle for nature from "the courtroom to the boardroom" coincident with corporate greenwashing campaigns (p. 106). Citing a 1990 survey by *Multinational Monitor*, Dowie points out that 67 individuals on the boards of 7 large environmental groups are also representatives for 92 major corporations (p. 56).

4. Author interview with John Audley, October 21, 1994, Washington, D.C.

5. The creation of the Friends of the Earth (FOE) put the organization at the front of labor-environmental cooperation through OSHA, Clean Air Act amendments, and, later, the Environmentalists for Full Employment (EFFE). The same political opportunities, and the strong antinuclear position that FOE took in the 1970s, also placed the group in direct conflict in the late 1970s with AFL-CIO leadership and, in particular, the leadership of the building and construction trade unions that were avidly pronuclear (Kazis & Grossman, 1982; Seigmann, 1985).

6. Greenwire interview, September 20, 1993.

7. Greenwire interview, September 20, 1993.

8. Dreiling interview with Cam Duncan, Greenpeace USA, October 19, 1994.

9. Dreiling interview, John Friedrich, trade campaign director, Clean Water Action. February 12, 1995.

10. The first case filed to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) was pursued by representatives of two groups that leaned more often to the pro-NAFTA camp than the anti-NAFTA camp, the National Audubon Society and the Grupo de los Cien (or Group of 100). The staff that filed the petition was among those more skeptical of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation and the decision by their leadership to support NAFTA. The ruling by the CEC no doubt reinforced anti-NAFTA sentiments within these organizations. Both organizations opposed GATT more vigorously than they supported NAFTA (Dreiling interview, Rhona Carter, staff, National Audubon Society).

11. For a discussion of these petitions, see Public Citizen (1996).

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