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The transnational politics of environmental NGOs: Governmental, economic, and social activism

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There is a widespread sense that 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 causes. 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 separately from a host of other forms of political practice. In the most general sense, NGOs wish to advance the cause of environ-

mental protection. They recognize that environmentally harmful human practices take place at the individual, group, corporate, and state levels, 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 behaviour with respect to environmental issues within their own territories (think, for example, of weak states like Somalia) – but also of economic and sociocultural 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 behaviour.[2] They represent mechanisms that influence human activity in all areas of life, including human interaction with nature. Environmental NGOs recognize that environmentally harmful activities are carried out by a host of actors, all of whom are animated by and subject to various forms of governance. As a result, NGOs engage multiple levels of collective life and enlist numerous forms of political power to alter widespread practices.

This chapter 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 forms of state power. The state enjoys the ability to shape widespread behaviour 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 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 chapter 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 chapter 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 chapter, 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 play in engaging it.

Environmental NGOs: Definitions

In the loosest sense of the term, NGOs 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 the 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 often only at the behest of, and remain fundamentally responsive to, states. Indeed, while the secretariats of IGOs are composed of civil servants who are free from state dictates, the decision-making organs of IGOs are composed of governmental delegates and this partially restricts IGO activities. 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 and take actions which have relevance across national boundaries. Some groups, such as Amnesty International or Medicins Sans Frontières, have actual offices in multiple countries and undertake campaigns outside the parameters of given states. Other groups, such as the Sierra Club in the United States or the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the United Kingdom, 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 homes, 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 – but simply notes the non-territoriality of their point of view. While not global in perspective, it certainly generates a non-national orientation. NGOs are, to use Rosenau's (1990) insightful phrase, ''sovereignty-free actors.''

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 United States is also a bona fide NGO. Although headquartered in the United States, in 1997 it launched a transnational campaign to support unrestricted possession of firearms, 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.[3]

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 by-product of efforts to protect a community's economic base or resist severe social dislocations. 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).[4] 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 the protection of the non-human world and it is this character, however thin, that enables one to analyse them together as a distinct entity.[5]

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 well-known Green Belt movement in Kenya, for instance, aims 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 United States is similar in its focus on environmental quality in the United States.

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 the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) are probably the best 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's death had an impact on transnational issues such as 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 favour of environmental protection are being articulated and generated. While data are sketchy, it is estimated that there are tens of thousands of NGOs working in some capacity to protect the environment (Conca 1996, 106–107).[6] Moreover, in so far as some of these organizations have memberships in the millions and budgets of over US$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 US$75 million while Greenpeace's was US$100 million and WWF's was US$200 million.[7] Finally, the number, membership figures, and financial power of NGOs fail to represent what is perhaps NGOs' most important strength – coalition-building between organizations. At least since the 1972 Stockholm Conference, and

much more noticeably 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. In so far 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 activities. The Antarctic and Southern Oceans Coalition, for instance, coordinates activities among 200 NGOs in 40 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 United States that 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 1999). Such groups are organized at the international level, playing an advocacy role for industries and businesses that 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 Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in Delhi against research undertaken by the World Resources Institute (WRI) concerning estimates of carbon production throughout the world. The CSE argued that the 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 the WRI's estimates were being accepted by many Northern NGOs and some states and sparked 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, 1992; Athanasiou 1996).

Environmental NGOs deserve careful scrutiny in so far as they are unelected and relatively unaccountable. The Worldwide 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 behaviour

States are the most important actors in world politics and fundamentally constitute the international system. They have the ability to shape widespread behaviour significantly 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. Recognizing the significance of state power, NGOs focus much of their efforts on influencing states and the state system (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.[8] International regimes are rules, codes of conduct, principles, and so forth that inform inter-state behaviour; environmental regimes are those that guide inter-state behaviour with regard to environmental issues. States create environmental regimes to address transboundary environmental problems, since air, water, shifting soils, and migratory animals, for example, care little for passports or border 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 (Hasenclever, 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 in which 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 a group of states.

The international toxic waste trade, for instance, 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 OECD to non-OECD countries.[9]

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 (General Accounting Office 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, the IUCN delegates research, monitoring, and technical assistance associated with its secretariat duties to an organization known as "TRAFFIC," which is staffed almost exclusively by WWF members and charged with CITES implementation. The 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 Sand (1990), since the inception of the European Union more than half of the infringement proceedings relating to international environmental issues entered against member states were based on formal complaints from local and regional environmental NGOs. 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 United States and United Kingdom (Wapner 1996, 127–128, 132)), there was a need to revise national com-

mitments 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, the 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 (1994) calls ''knowledge brokers'') pressed for revisions – NGOs coordinated much of the effort and their activities won government support for establishing the 1990 London Amendments 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 not single-handedly responsible for the London and Copenhagen revisions, NGOs provided an essential component in 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 behaviour. States have the ability to reach into and shape the 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 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, 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 behaviour.

Economic forces, like ecological ones, inherently know no boundaries. Production, distribution, exchange, and consumption can, and increasingly do, take place across state 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 behaviour 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 forces, it is difficult for NGOs (or any other actor, for that matter) to develop a conceptually clear purchase point on economic issues and direct economic activities. NGOs undertake the challenge by conceptually ''unpacking'' the world economy and identifying certain nodes of power within it. They then target those nodes that most effectively engage environmental issues. A prime example of this is Greenpeace's work to eliminate waste dumping in the world's oceans and seas.

Throughout the 1970s, ocean dumping of waste was an accepted practice. For materials already at or close to bodies of water, it provided a relatively inexpensive form of disposal. For hazardous wastes, it provided a form of disposal that kept the terrestrial environment free from contamination. In both cases, it allowed waste to be kept out of sight and thus out of mind. Since the 1970s, Greenpeace, among other organizations, has worked to prevent and ultimately ban ocean dumping. One of its most dramatic campaigns along these lines has been to stop the dismantling of gas and oil rigs at sea, and force polluters to dismantle them on land. Key to its efforts has been the pressure it brought to bear on Shell Oil's Brent Spar installation in the North Sea.

There are over 400 gas/oil installations in the North Sea that will soon cease to be viable and will need dismantling. In the spring of 1995, Shell announced plans and received governmental approval to dispose of its Brent Spar by dumping it into the North Sea. Such a prospect became a significant concern for Greenpeace; the 4,000-tonne installation was believed to be loaded with toxic and radioactive sludge. According to Greenpeace, if Brent Spar were dismantled at sea, it would create a dangerous precedent for the disposal of other rigs and perhaps fuel an effort by many industries to turn to ocean dumping (Greenpeace 1998a). As a result, in May 1995 Greenpeace organized an intensive campaign against Shell. Over two dozen activists from six North Sea countries

worked together to stage an on-site protest, with other Greenpeace members orchestrating the campaign from their home offices. Among its many activities, Greenpeace landed a helicopter on the oil platform and brought activists by sea to occupy the installation. This included unfurling a banner that read ''Save the North Sea'' to publicize the issue. Additionally, two Greenpeace ships circled the rig with photographers producing images of the occupation that were sent out electronically to media sources throughout the world, and occupiers wrote a diary of day-to-day activities that was also sent out electronically to world media sources. Finally, Greenpeace organized a boycott of Shell products that led, according to the London *Times*, to a 30 per cent reduction in sales throughout Europe (Millar 1995, 19). These efforts were well coordinated and took place across state boundaries. The Greenpeace campaign aimed to engage the public and Shell's subsidiaries throughout much of the world. Its efforts eventually paid off. In June 1995, after constant pressure, Shell reversed its decision and announced that it would bring the installation in and dismantle it on shore (Radford and White 1995, 1).

What is important to notice in this campaign is that Greenpeace did not target governments *per se* but rather Shell Oil. In fact, Shell apparently embarrassed former UK Prime Minister John Major by reversing its decision without first informing him. Hours before Shell's announcement, Major was in Parliament defending the decision to allow Shell to dismantle the rig in the North Sea (Nuttall and Leathley 1995, 1). Moreover, Shell had initially won approval from the Oslo and Paris Commission (OSPARCOM), an intergovernmental body that regulates pollution in the north-east Atlantic, and ignored this approval in its decision to bring the rig to shore (Nuttall and Leathley 1995, 1). Greenpeace targeted Shell as an economic actor and found ways to influence its behaviour. The campaign represents an attempt to target directly the economic sphere as opposed to the strictly governmental one.

The Brent Spar episode has proved to be important for setting the standard for dismantling oil and gas installations. Weeks after the Greenpeace campaign, all parties to OSPARCOM, with the exception of the United Kingdom and Norway, agreed to a moratorium on ocean dumping of oil and gas installations (which became a complete ban when OSPARCOM met again in July 1998). Moreover, since June 1995 12 decommissioned oil installations have come ashore for disposal even though at least three of these were in deep enough water conceivably to be left in situ, and a number of these were under the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom and Norway and thus not bound by the OSPARCOM agreement – for example, the Odin installation (Norway) (Greenpeace 1998b) and Shell's Leman BK (UK) (Greenpeace 1998a). In short, Greenpeace's campaign against Brent Spar reoriented ocean dumping

practices. At a minimum, it set a standard of good conduct that has put in place a voluntary regime for corporate practice. Again, it represents an effort by an NGO to target the economic dimension of world collective life and understand the degree to which the economic realm represents a form of governance.

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 gained the upper hand 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 not only by pressuring specific corporations to change their practices but also by devising mechanisms for holding sets of corporations accountable to citizens.

One of the more prominent strategies for 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 labour in their operations throughout the world. These agreements were initiated and are being monitored by labour and development NGOs (Broad and Cavanaugh 2000). A similar effort has taken place with regard to environmental issues. The best 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, among other things, to minimize pollution, conserve non-renewable 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 multinational 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 and Cavanaugh 2000). It represents another strategy of engaging directly 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 substantial 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 towards the world through the socialization process. The result is that they operate in the world informed by the sociohistorical 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 behaviour 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 in so far as it calls for, according to some of its more radical advocates, adopting a certain world view 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, environmentally conscious citizens.

In parts of Asia, there is a tradition of ingesting parts of 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, haemorrhoids, 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. The 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 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; 1997b). 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 many 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 ongoing 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 best 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, the Sea Shepherds Conservation Society, the 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 US$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, the 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 newborns (often in full view of mother seals). Seal pups are, like whales, ''charismatic mega-fauna'' – that is, large species that 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 Euro-

pean 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 efforts to isolate and manipulate cultural formations. They aim to change the way societies understand human relations with nonhuman species and thus alter the sociohistorical context within which people operate as they interact with the environment. The implicit understanding behind such a strategy is that sociocultural 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 chapter has tried analytically to circumscribe three spheres of collective life that NGOs target to advance environmental protection. It has presented these spheres as unproblematic in so far 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 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 latter 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.[10] 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 by economic and social forces that animate widespread behaviour. 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.

Notes

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2. On the concept of governance, see Wapner 1996, 3ff.
3. It should be noted that the term NGO can be distinguished from what the United Nations and especially the Commission on Sustainable Development recognize as ''major groups.'' ''Major groups'' include not only political organizations but also indigenous peoples, local authorities, business and industry, and other associations. The distinction is that some major groups may not have been established to induce political change, but either find themselves having a stake or role in the way certain public issues are understood or particular public problems are addressed. While recognizing the importance of ''major groups'' in world affairs and, in particular, in world environmental issues, this chapter restricts itself to a focus simply on what are conventionally understood as NGOs.
4. A good example of such environmental NGOs can be found in Dawson 1996.
5. For an insightful discussion of the interplay between, say, environment and development groups, see Durning 1989.
6. 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 Fisher, cited in Conca 1996.
7. For membership and budget figures, see Wapner 1996, 2, note 3.
8. On the distinction between private and public international regimes, see Haufler 1997, which is the first full-length exploration of private international regimes of which the author is aware.

9. See generally Wynne 1989; Agarwal and Narain 1992.
10. 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 1995.

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