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Environmentalism, Resistance and Solidarity

The Politics of Friends of the Earth International

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Preface and Acknowledgements

As is often the case, the origins of this project came from the coming together of several elements. We had already carried out research separately on environmental movements and had been activists in environmental movements in our own countries. Aware that environmentalism in the global South was growing, we found that existing studies were mainly of specific localized campaigns. Most of these were to be found in the political ecology literature in geography, general characterizations of Southern environmentalism or studies of transnational campaigns and their impacts. But there was very little on the ongoing debates and interaction between groups from the North and South.¹

Then, in 2003, a senior activist in Friends of the Earth (FoE) Australia and Ombudsman for Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) – Cam Walker – suggested to the authors that FoEI would be a good case study for examination of relations between environmentalism in the North and South. One of us was working on a book-length comparison of environmental campaigns across the majority and minority worlds (Doyle 2005) while the other had recently published a study of environmentalism in Northern countries (Doherty 2002). We felt that the debates within FoEI about strategy offered a basis for understanding some of the core questions about transnational environmentalism that had arisen in our previous work.

In 2004, we gained initial seed funding for research on FoE from the University of Adelaide's small grant scheme. After this, we presented a preliminary analysis of our research in a European Consortium of Political Research-funded workshop we organized in Granada in 2005, on comparisons between environmental movements in the North and South (Doherty and Doyle 2006). The discussions at this workshop gave us the impetus to apply for grants from the Australian Research Council and the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Even at this very early stage, it became apparent to us how difficult it can be to secure support for research into social movements and social movement organizations (SMOs). First and foremost, national research academies increasingly have to justify funding research projects on the basis of rather narrowly based national interests. Social movements, by their very nature, leak through national boundaries, on many occasions de-territorializing the established borders of nation states, and then re-territorializing boundaries and borders defined by disparate regions, networks and other contested power relationships. Demonstrating the social and economic benefits of research on international movements for Australia or the United Kingdom is therefore quite a challenge. In addition, because SMOs like FoEI are

multi-nodal, their ideologies and practices can be incredibly diverse from country to country. In Australia, FoE is considered to be at the radical edge of the environmental movement, usually working outside the state, and often-times in direct opposition to it, as well as large corporations. Partly as a result, despite successfully going through the academic review process, the application for funding to do the research was vetoed through political interference by conservative political forces. This has rarely (if ever) happened before in the history of research funding in Australia – the same fate shared with eight other previously approved research projects – now infamously referred to as the Nelson Nine (Alexander 2007).

To state the obvious, it is not only merit that determines grant success; the broader social and political climate must be amenable to the purposes and subject of the research. In the United Kingdom, the funding regime for social science was more favourable – with no role for government in deciding on grant applications. Furthermore, the ESRC had gone against the usual trend of favouring research projects on the United Kingdom, with an innovative research programme on Non-Governmental Public Action and a brief to think about the relationships between North and South. Ours was one of the 37 projects funded, and we are grateful to the ESRC for this support. Interestingly, these substantial differences in national research climates led to Tim Doyle leaving Australia in 2006, and joining Brian Doherty at Keele University, where a particularly vibrant research culture into the politics and international relations of the environment had already been established.

Securing funding and institutional support, however, were only the first hurdles. SMOs have a commitment to openness and transparency, but they are also formalized organizations, exhibiting features found in legal entities, such as hierarchy, clear descriptions of office and tasks, separation between an administrative arm and the power of elected officials. In FoEI's case, this political and structural dance between the features of new social movements and formal organizations is particularly prominent, as the federation deliberately aspires to honour the traditions of decentralization, while at the same time, but to a lesser extent, needing to protect its reputation as an international NGO.

This organizational and cultural diversity – the sheer multiplicity of FoEI's polity across national and regional experiences – also had an enormous impact on us in the early days of the research, as we struggled with the most critical part of a research project, which is gaining access.

In their discussion on the ethics and politics of research on activism, Chatterton et al. (2010) argue that academics should let their agendas be led by the interests of the movements that they work with. While we are sympathetic to this argument politically, putting it into practice is easier said than done. Our project met this criterion insofar as the idea originally came from discussions with a prominent FoE activist. This did not mean, however,

that everyone involved in FoE was keen to be the subject of research. Some were encouraging, hoping that as relative outsiders (although also environmentalists) we could help to clarify FoE's own processes, communicating their experiences to other groups facing similar challenges; others were fearful that research might exacerbate internal tensions. Thus in 2004, while we were still trying to secure the aforementioned funding for the project, we began the formal processes of negotiation with FoEI. Although FoEI exists across 74 countries with national offices determining their own political agendas, the International Secretariat (IS), based in Amsterdam, works as a small coordinating unit with a professional staff. Some of the key staff in IS were concerned that a research project looking at North–South relations might cause instability. As a result, at this early stage, we struggled to gain official support and it seemed we had met another insurmountable stumbling block. We needed a dialogue about how we might do the research, and we travelled to Malaysia to meet directly with the then Chair of FoEI, Meena Raman, in order to solicit her support. To her great credit, she was willing to take the risk of allowing FoEI to be scrutinized by two Western academics, and this decision was backed by the Executive Committee.

These access issues are also particularly poignant when exploring issues of North–South identities. As we shall see in the remainder of this book, although FoEI has worked assiduously to pursue a more democratic agenda across the North–South divide, their central administration remains very much in the European North. The North, with its Western, positivist traditions, usually demands academics to remain outside the object of research. In this way, information can be released from the organization to outsiders, resulting in a more removed and less complete view, but a more controlled one. In this way, the North continues ‘to own the story’. In the South, it may be that the separation between the activist and academic is more relaxed (indeed contrarily, it is often assumed essential that both roles be pursued simultaneously). Interestingly then, our initial access to the organization's records, histories, practices and personnel came via the South, not the North.

Even when we finally began the empirical phase of the work later in 2006, there were understandable sensitivities around the research that remained for the duration of the project. At times, there was a risk that we might have to withdraw and, throughout, it was critical to be able to show those most concerned about ‘being researched’ that we were gathering data that could inform FoE's own understanding of its processes. We hope that we have done this here. We also want to acknowledge our gratitude to all in FoE who assisted us with interviews and access to FoEI's minutes and records.

An additional challenge posed by movement-based research is that if it is accurate in judgements about what is happening at any given moment in time, this is often unsurprising to participants. ‘Tell us something we don't

know' might be a fair reaction. Even so, we have aimed to situate FoEI as a particular kind of transnational SMO with a rich internal political culture and, by so doing, sought to demonstrate the wider significance of its strategic debates and network processes, particularly for those wishing to understand the potential for effective cooperation between groups from the global North and the global South.

We have already touched upon some specific people who should be acknowledged in the pursuit of this long-standing research project, namely, Cam Walker, who not only helped initiate this project but also was kind enough to read the complete draft of this book, offering organizational insights, correcting errors of fact and providing us with fair criticisms of our work from within FoE. As touched upon, we wanted FoE to have the opportunity to address the specifics of our work before publication, and Cam provided us with this valued opportunity. Thanks also, as aforesaid, to Meena Raman – without her supporting the project, it is hard to see how it would have gone ahead.

There are numerous others who also need to be acknowledged. Jude Howell from the London School of Economics and Political Science led the ESRC programme for Non-Government Public Action with great collegial success. Clare Saunders (now an established academic at Exeter University) was instrumental as a postdoctoral researcher in assisting with the design of the questionnaire and played an essential role in the analysis of the data even after the money to employ her ran out. She was an essential part of the research team for this project, and we owe her a major debt of thanks. Two inspirational green activists from Manchester, Matt Fawcett and Helen Woodcock, carried out research for us in Guatemala in 2007. Sam La Rocca, of FoE Australia, came to Keele for three months in the summer of 2008, funded by the ESRC as a Practitioner Fellow. As well as completing some wonderful interviews for us, her internal working knowledge of the organization was priceless. Within the FoEI Secretariat Mae Ocampo was very generous with her time and along with others in FoEI provided invaluable insights and information. The same was also true of Ann Doherty (no relation of the co-author) who read some of the articles and reports that came out along the way and offered us support and detailed comments – thank you to both and to all the other staff at the Secretariat who offered help in other ways.

Still others wrestled with the ordering and editing of this manuscript. Thanks particularly to Adela Alfonsi, Jessica Hodgens, Georgia Lawrence-Doyle and Lucille Gore for this valuable editorial work. Generous recognition, also, must be given to our editors at Palgrave Macmillan, Alexandra Webster, Christina Brian and Amanda McGrath, to Cherline Daniel of Integra and to the anonymous copy-editors, all of whose patience we must have tried severely.

Thanks to both our families for their unflagging patience and support. And finally – and most importantly – to the people of Friends of the Earth who live across all parts of the globe, each day struggling to find a more ecologically just place to live for the Earth's inhabitants, human and non-human.

Brian Doherty and Timothy Doyle

Abbreviations

AE	Acción Ecológica/FoE Ecuador
AGM	Annual General Meeting
AIC	Advanced Industrial Country
ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
AP	Asia Pacific
ASOC	Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition
ATALC	Friends of the Earth Africa Latin America and the Caribbean
BGM	Biennial General Meeting
BUND	Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland/FoE Germany
CAFTA	Central American Free Trade Agreement
CAN	Climate Action Network
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
CED	FoE Cameroon
CEIBA	FoE Guatemala
CESTA	FoE El Salvador
CJA	Climate Justice Action
CJE	Climate, Justice and Energy
CJN	Climate Justice Now!
CNL	Chevron Nigeria Limited
CONAMAQ	Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu
COP	Conference of parties in UNFCCC
CSO	Civil society organization
EcoSoc	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EGM	extraordinary general meeting
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EMO	Environmental Movement Organization
EJRN	Economic Justice, Resisting Neoliberalism
ERA	Environmental Rights Action/FoE Nigeria
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
Ex-Com	FoEI Executive Committee
EWNI	England, Wales and Northern Ireland
EZLN	Zapatista National Liberation Army
FDI	Foreign direct investment
FTA	Free trade agreement
FoE	Friends of the Earth
FoEI	Friends of the Earth International

GM	Genetically modified
GMO	Genetically modified organism
GPI	Greenpeace International
HDI	Human Development Index
IFI	international financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organization
IS	International Secretariat
JA	Justiça Ambiental!/FoE Mozambique
LVC	La Via Campesina
MD	Milieudefensie/FoE Netherlands
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MNLM	National Movement of Struggle for Household and Shelter
MOSOP	Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NAPE	FoE Uganda
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NPT	Network Process Team
NVDA	non-violent direct action
PGA	People's Global Action
REDD	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation
REDES	FoE Uruguay
RMOG	Resisting Mining Oil and Gas
SAP	Structural Adjustment Policy
SAM	Sahabat Alam Malaysia/FoE Malaysia
SMO	Social Movement Organization
SVPP	Strategic Vision and Planning Process
TNC	Transnational corporation
TSMO	Transnational Social Movement Organization
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environmental Development
UNCHE	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WALHI	FoE Indonesia
WMC	Western Mining Corporation
WMW	World March of Women
WSF	World Social Forum
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (known as the World Wildlife Fund in the United States)