

# **FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: THE ANTI-DAM MOVEMENT IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL, 1979-1992<sup>1</sup>**

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*A case study of the movement of people affected by dams in southern Brazil shows how particular local mobilizations are linked to national and global economics, politics, and social movements. In the early stages, the progressive church was the predominant influence and was largely responsible for framing the key issue as peasants' right to land, while left intellectuals contributed a class analytical frame. After 1988, the weakening of the Federal government regional power company ELETROSUL, the crisis of the Left after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the defeat of the agrarian reform movement, the rise of the international and national ecology movements, and the anti-dam movement's need for a broader political and financial base all contributed to the adoption of a broadened and more pro-active land/energy/ecology frame and an alliance with international environmentalism.*

The anti-dam movement in southern Brazil began in 1979 as a local mobilization to aid peasants affected by the proposed flooding of river valleys by large hydroelectric dams. Initially the movement organization was known as CRAB (*Comissão Regional de Atingidos por Barragens*, Regional Committee of those Displaced by Dams). Framing the issue as a land struggle, local activists took advantage of early openings in a democratic transition and drew on their national and international church networks to defend those affected (or *atingidos*). In the process, they broadened the collective identity of *atingidos* from the government's definition of owning land that was to be flooded, first, to working or living on land that was to be flooded and, then, to those who would be affected in other ways. In 1987 they signed a landmark Accord with ELETROSUL which met movement demands of just compensation in cash or land prior to dam construction. In the late 1980s, in the wake of the crisis in mobilization following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the defeat of the agrarian reform movement, the growing conservatism of the church and the weakening of its chief adversary, ELETROSUL, the anti-dam movement came into contact with the international environmentalist movement, forging a new ideology which linked class and environmental concerns. In 1991, CRAB played a lead role in the First National Congress of People Affected by Dams in Brasilia, which created MAB (*Movimento Nacional de Atingidos por Barragens*, National Movement of People Affected by Dams). The national movement was divided into five regions and CRAB was re-named MAB-Sul (*Movimento Nacional dos Atingidos por Barragens-Sul*, Movement of People Affected by Dams – Southern Region).

In every step of the process, local activists took initiative to address local concerns, drew on their network ties to larger national and international movements to obtain needed information and resources, and simultaneously identified themselves as part of a larger movement while maintaining a strong local identification and focus. Although mobilization declined after 1988 with the reduced presence of ELETROSUL in the region, it has increased since 1997 in response to newly privatized dam projects, particularly the Machadinho Dam (Switkes 1998). MAB-Sul has gained wide recognition in the 1990s for its management of the Itá Dam Resettlement Project in Paraná State.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of international networks in local mobilizations, and growing theorization from the international end about the relation between these international networks and national social movements. This scholarship needs to be integrated with a realistic understanding of just how "international" and local actors interact on the ground, in particular mobilizations. Local, national, and international actors are each agents acting to pursue their own ends, at times aligning their efforts with others' when it serves their purposes to do so, constantly responding to the situations created by the actions of others. Understanding these processes requires appreciation of nested political opportunity structures, a more complete theorization of external-internal movement linkages, and a recognition of the complex processes underlying frame shifts. We draw on existing social movements theory and recent work on international movement networks and use this case to illuminate the specific ways the different levels are linked.

### Theoretical Framework

Our work builds on the growing stream of scholarship on national and international political opportunity structures. Although "political opportunity" was initially sometimes conceived as a unidimensional continuum, in which whole societies or movements or eras had more or less political opportunity, political opportunity is now generally seen as a qualitative multi-dimensional network field in which different groups of actors, kinds of appeals, modes of protest, and forms of organization are responded to differently by the other actors in their environment, and thus have different prospects for success.<sup>2</sup> In this conception, particular eras or locations can be repressive for some forms of mobilization but, paradoxically, more favorable for others. Recent scholarship has extended social movements theory to international movement organizations. Boli and Thomas show that there has been an enormous growth in international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) from about 200 in 1900 to nearly 4000 in 1980, with roughly 100 new INGOs founded annually (Boli and Thomas 1997). Several works by Smith (Smith 1995; Smith et al. 1994) document the extent and importance of transnational social movements including the women's, environmental, and human rights movements. Keck and Sikkink (1998) provide a rich theoretical and empirical account of what they call international "advocacy networks" which are important conduits for information and influence. Their research on environmental advocacy networks (1998, Chapter 4) is particularly useful in helping understand the evolution of the movement of people affected by dams in southern Brazil during the period 1979-1992. Tarrow (1998) and the essays in Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco (1997) specifically discuss the ways in which social movements concepts can be extended to international mobilizations. Other scholars continue to expand the concept of political opportunity structures to encompass international influences and the uncertainties and instabilities which arises as regimes change in democratic transitions (e.g. Pagnucco 1996, Tarrow 1998, and essays in Smith et al. 1997). Keck and Sikkink (1998) posit that international advocacy networks become important resources for national movements when there is a barrier to a movement's ability to influence its national government. Tarrow (1998) discusses the variety of relations that may hold between actors in different nations, including not only movement alliances, but also diffusion and political exchanges. In particular, actors may be able to employ their links to one set of actors to strengthen their strategic position with respect to other actors.

### *Nested Political Opportunity Structures*

The concept of *nested political opportunity structures* is a useful way to think of the ways these different levels affect local action. Eisinger's (1973) original use of "political opportunity" referred to cities in the U.S., and subsequent work by other scholars (e.g. Hellman 1987) confirms that municipal, state, and regional political and economic structures always give a local character and add local constraints to local manifestations of social movements. Local political opportunity structures are embedded in national political opportunity structures, which are in turn embedded in international political opportunity structures. These nested structures create the possibility for very complex patterns of relationships among actors.

### *Clarifying Relations Between Internal and External*

In analyzing these nested structures, it is important to clarify the relation between "external" and "internal" actors in a local struggle. If research is focused only on international organizations and networks as actors, there is a risk of replicating the original "resource mobilization" error and assume that external resources and international advocacy efforts cause local mobilizations. However, the empirical literature social movements seems quite definite that most local mobilization cycles begin with indigenous or internal insurgency which then attracts external resources (e.g. McAdam 1982, Morris 1984, Tarrow 1998, Koopmans 1993). These resources come both from the "conscience constituents" who support the movement's values, and from external elites. The international advocacy networks studied by Keck and Sikkink generally parallel national conscience constituents, but many international NGOs also receive heavy funding from "elites," including national governments and large corporate foundations. The most common interpretation of resource flows from elites to movements within nations has been that external elites donate to movements for the purpose of moderating or coopting them (e.g. Haines 1984, Jenkins & Eckert 1986), but this possibility seems less often to be considered in international resource flows. Instead, international elites are said to channel money to local movements to undercut or circumvent national governments (Smith 1990).

Several other dimensions of internal/external relationships also need to be recognized. First, the boundary between "external" institutions and "internal" agents is often blurred, for example when the regional priests and university professors are adult children of peasants in the area. Similarly, key support for the southern Civil Rights Movements came from African-American churches in the north (Morris 1984). Case studies repeatedly find that people with dual or complex identities are important "network bridges" between political communities who aid the flow of information and resources between them. The Gramscian "organic intellectual" remains an important feature of many local mobilizations.

Second, it is a mistake to conceive local activists as the passive recipients of external support and overlook proactive fund-raising by local movements. Additionally, external-internal links are not one-way resource flows but rather two-way flows of influence and information. International networks and movements "need" viable active local groups just as much as local groups need external resources. Their interchanges are bilateral, interactive, and strategic, with both agency and reactivity occurring on both sides of the relation.

Thirdly, it is crucial to differentiate among international actors. Some seek to foment mobilization, others to moderate it. Moreover, the international networks involving themselves in

particular local mobilization often enter on opposite sides of the struggle. This multitude of international networks may be understood with Maney's (1998) useful extension of Klandermans' (1990) concept of alliance and conflict structures, which, in turn, is compatible with Keck and Sikkink's (1998) discussions of advocacy networks and meshes with a multidimensional network conception of political opportunity structures. International-level actors seek local allies as part of their international-level competition for resources and influence. In this way, local actors may have bridged ties into global alliance and conflict networks and bring otherwise poor and marginalized communities into contact with powerful international institutions or social movements. When these ties are in place, both sides may be proactive in seeking to influence others and pursue their goals.

### *Specifying How Frames and Identities Change with Opportunity Structures*

Framing processes (Snow et al. 1986, Snow and Benford 1988) and collective identities (Melucci 1989, 1995) are important in this case. The framing of the anti-dam movement clearly shifted over time in southern Brazil. Initially understood as being a land struggle, as being "about" peasants' right to land and livelihood, the anti-dam movement evolved into an environmental and land struggle, as being also "about" the destruction of natural habitat through misguided industrialization and agricultural policies. Similarly, the collective identity *atingidos* was clearly actively constructed and reconstructed by the local activists in the process of their struggle. These shifting frames and collective identities had important implications for political opportunity: they defined who was a member of the affected group, and who would be logical allies for the struggle. During the first phase, 1979-1987, allies were those concerned about land struggles and the plight of the poor; in the phase since 1988, specifically in the period 1988-1992 under study, allies were also those concerned about the environment. It is well recognized that frames and collective identities are consequential for resource flows and alliances, and are tied to evolving international master frames, consistent with a great deal of research in other locales (e.g. Johnston 1991; Klandermans 1997; Marullo, Pagnucco and Smith 1996; Snow and Benford 1992; and the essays in McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996).

However, in the anti-dam struggle case and, we suspect, in most cases, it would be a gross distortion to imagine that shifts in identities and frames were made lightly, in a simple opportunistic chase after resources and allies. The case materials clearly reveal that both the land struggle frame and the later shift to a more ecological frame were tied to deep and complex ideological understandings of the political and economic world. The shift between frames required a great deal of intellectual and ideological "work." It was not a matter of activists' simply picking a frame that would better reach out to others, or of trying to resonate with or bridge to others' ideologies taken as givens. Instead it involved a wholesale reworking of the activists' own understandings in which they sought to reconcile core values and beliefs with new ideas. This reworking was deeply affected by the new conditions – the new political opportunity structure – in which they found themselves. In short, it was much more like a learning process and a bilateral influence process than a marketing scheme. Understanding the complexity of this process is necessary for avoiding facile interpretations of frame alignment processes.

### Methodology

Field work in the southern states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina was conducted by the first author from October, 1992 through January, 1993. A variety of data collection methods and techniques were used to provide diverse perspectives and to cross-check factual claims. Overall,

approximately one hundred people were interviewed, including movement leaders and participants, leaders of the progressive Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran Churches, university advisors, NGO activists, a limited number of affected persons, and ELETROSUL and World Bank officials. Analysis of these interviews was cross-checked and supplemented by analysis of written documentation of various types. The analysis of CRAB's frame evolution was based on a detailed reading of CRAB files, including position papers, minutes of meetings, newsletters, and other internal documents, as well as interviews with participants. Primary data on resource flows was obtained from CRAB staff and documents and from officials and documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil (IECLB), which served as a conduit for Bread for the World's funds to CRAB. Papers based on this research have been presented and circulated in Brazil among academics and movement activists, where its empirical claims have been widely substantiated, and a few earlier errors of fact or interpretation have been corrected.

#### Dam Resistance as a Land Struggle: 1979-1987

In 1979, ELETROSUL, the Federal government regional power company of the three-state region of southern Brazil, announced that it would build 22 hydroelectric dams in the Uruguai River Basin (Figures 1 and 2). By 1983, church activists, aided by professors at the regional college, rural "new" unionists (Keck 1989) and, by 1986, a group of new, young activists, had organized a broad mobilization in affected areas of the states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul which expanded its original aims from just compensation for those displaced by dams to outright opposition to the building of dams. By 1987, the movement in southern Brazil had achieved notable success in obtaining recognition and concessions from the electric sector, as evidenced by the signing of a major Accord which, backed by popular mobilization, enabled CRAB to maintain a strong bargaining position with ELETROSUL. These initial organizers succeeded because they had network ties to other peasant movements in the area (Navarro 1996; Grzybowski 1985, 1987) and to larger national and international movements and because recent events had created space for their mobilization. Consistent with their backgrounds and network ties, they framed the issue as part of the larger struggle of rural people for land against the destructive forces of capitalist expansion, and built a broad-based movement which was strongly allied with other land and anti-dam struggles in other regions.

#### Structure of Political Opportunities, 1979-1987

The backdrop for the movement was the shifting political opportunity structure in the transition from repressive authoritarianism, conventionally divided into the overlapping periods of controlled liberalization (1974-1985) and democratic transition (1983-1988). The Geisel government (1974-79) constituted the third stage of Brazil's military regime. Its policy of *distensão* was a program of careful and controlled liberalization measures which began to ease repression and grant human rights (Alves 1985). In 1979, João Figueiredo was inaugurated President and began the "opening" (*abertura*) subphase of controlled liberalization, the process of restoring political rights. The government decreed partial political amnesty, which allowed all exiles to return to Brazil and all political leaders to regain their rights. This increased the ranks of Left activists and intellectuals exercising opposition to the authoritarian regime through political parties, especially the new Worker's Party (PT), trade unions and

NGOS. Elite opposition groups, such as the National Council of Catholic Bishops (CNBB), further opened the political space.

The deterioration of the Brazilian economy in the late 1970s and early 1980s contributed both to elite fragmentation and popular protest. A combination of processes, both internal and external to Brazil, had combined to create the debt crisis of 1982. In the early 1980s, as external lending contracted, the debt crisis became part of a broader economic crisis. During the period 1981 to 1983, Brazil experienced the sharpest drop in economic activity in the country's history (Navarro 1992). A “growing wave of protest culminated in 1984 with the campaign for direct presidential elections, which entailed a high level of popular mobilization and ... framed the issue of democratization from new perspectives” (Navarro 1992:6-7).

As opposition groups were obtaining increased access to the political system, the military, economic and political elites were becoming weaker and more fragmented. In 1981, the Federal government sent military forces to repress landless peasants encamped at Encruzilhada Natalino, in the region of the dams movement, but they stopped short of total repression. This relatively successful resistance of the landless took on symbolic and strategic significance, and is considered to be the birth of the MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*, regional and national movement of landless rural workers). This and several other key events signaled divisions within the military and encouraged subsequent mobilization. The ascending phase of the cycle of protest benefitted all movements, as they further weakened elite repression and worked in alliance with each other.

Political elites were also divided. In Rio Grande do Sul, despite the election in 1982 of a governor who supported the military regime, the state legislature provided a forum for popular groups and movements via opposition parties, in 1983 holding legislative hearings, publishing a report on the dams issue, and providing meeting space for a statewide meeting of the movement. With regard to regional and local elites, although ELETROSUL courted mayors and leaders of producer cooperatives to support dam construction plans, most were divided or awaited further specification of ELETROSUL'S plans.

A campaign for direct elections in 1984 failed, as military and political elites negotiated a transition pact. In January of 1985 the electoral college chose Tancredo Neves, candidate of an opposition coalition, to be the first civilian president to be elected in 21 years. When Neves died in April, 1985, Vice President José Sarney was sworn in as president, promising to maintain the course set by Tancredo Neves. His initial priorities were to draft a National Agrarian Reform Plan (PNRA) and to gather a National Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution. The latter was promulgated in October, 1988, after a process marked by a high degree of popular participation and completed the process of institutional normalization and democratic transition (Moisés 1989) in course since 1983. The re-creation of formal democratic institutions and weakening of ELETROSUL contributed to demobilization and signaled CRAB's transition to a new phase in which it would need to seek new alliances.

#### *Religious Networks and the Availability of Resources and Information*

The anti-dam struggle was rooted in a religious and class understanding of the needs of poor people who needed land for their livelihood. The southern region of Brazil comprises the states of Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná (Figure 1). Its rural areas are populated primarily by *colonos*<sup>3</sup>, who still retain their largely German and Italian ethnic identities and cultural and religious

practices, although speaking Portuguese and sharing a Brazilian national identity. These peasant smallholders were severely affected by the highly selective processes of agricultural modernization and agro-industrialization during the late 1960s and the 1970s, which resulted in socio-economic differentiation and increasing economic marginalization.

Transformations in the Brazilian Catholic Church during the 1960s and 70s led progressive priests and other pastoral agents to orient themselves toward the needs of peasants in a land rights framework and to provide the only viable basis for mobilization. After the military coup of 1964, and especially during the period 1968-73, when repression was most harsh, the Catholic Church became the only voice of resistance. The church developed an elaborate word-of-mouth communication system for organizing self-help projects and reacting to human rights violations. Personal and professional ties forged a strong national and international communications and resources network. In 1975 the Brazilian CPT (*Comissão Pastoral da Terra*, Land Pastoral Committee) was created from grassroots origins as an autonomous pastoral entity whose mission was to be at the service of peasants' causes. The CPT was itself a product of developments in global Catholicism and the particular Brazilian experience. In the late 1970s, the CPT actively supported those peasants in southern Brazil dislocated by the giant Itaipu dam and others who would later form the MST.

International religious networks became available to the poor of southern Brazil through a complex multilateral influence process as European churches struggled with the ideological challenges of domestic Marxism and the moral claims of the needy in developing nations. Pope Paul issued his most progressive statement in relation to the Third World, *Populorum Progressio*, in 1967, and in 1968 the Medellín Conference of Latin American bishops approved a document emphasizing the need for structural change in Latin America and stimulating liberation theology, with its strong Marxian themes of class struggle and capitalist imperialism. By the late 1970s, the Brazilian church had addressed the church's conservative-progressive conflict and found internal harmony around the "preferential option for the poor." European churches created development organizations to respond to the needs of developing nations, bypassing governments to give money directly to private groups serving the poor. Some of these new organizations, such as the French Catholic Committee Against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), grew out of efforts initiated in response to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC) which had been launched by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization. In Germany, the Campaign Against Hunger and Disease (MISEREOR) was established by Catholic Bishops in 1958 and Bread for the World by Protestant churches in 1959 (Smith 1990:83). These organizations tended to be staffed by left-leaning ex-missionaries who were eager to fund programs for structural change as well as direct relief. The large German ethnic population in southern Brazil influenced MISEREOR and Bread for the World to form a progressive support alliance in the area to support the collaborative efforts of the CPT and the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The activists who initiated resistance to the Rio Uruguai dams project were CPT pastoral agents in collaboration with a German Evangelical Lutheran pastor, rural unionists and leftist faculty at the regional university. These people were Gramscian "organic intellectuals" who lived in and were closely tied to the local communities while linked to international discourses and resources through the progressive church, with its close ties to unions and the emerging Workers Party. Many of them were

themselves descendants of the original Italian or German *colonos* and valued the local ethnic customs, religious beliefs, and peasant way of life.

During the period 1979-83, public access to information from ELETROSUL on dam construction was very difficult, causing uneasiness and uncertainty among *colonos* about their future. However, this was not sufficient to generate mobilization. Links with external communication networks were essential for obtaining and distributing the necessary information about construction plans and resettlement options. Pastoral agents were able to obtain specific information about government plans, determine which areas would be impacted, and obtain testimony from other regions about the experiences with government compensation and resettlement programs.

The Bishop of Chapecó, Santa Catarina, Dom José Gomes, obtained crucial information through the National Conference of Bishops and placed human and material resources of the Church at the disposal of the incipient movement. Several early movement were former catholic priests or seminarians. Pastors of the Evangelical Lutheran Church arranged a visit by a man affected by the giant Itaipu Dam, whose testimony, along with a videotaped documentary, dramatized the plight of dam-affected people. In addition, three radio stations in the region owned or controlled by the Catholic Church transmitted news about plans for dam construction and about activities of CRAB.

The initial mobilization drew on local resources. In the very beginning, some of the organizers themselves paid for gasoline expenses to attend community meetings. Local churches began to contribute small amounts to pay for CRAB expenses. Once the pastoral agents had mobilized the rural trade unions, the latter began to make a small fixed annual contribution, of one to five minimum wages on a monthly basis. Staff of FAPES - the regional college of Erechim, Rio Grande do Sul, channeled funds previously obtained from CCFD of France and MISEREOR of Germany to pay for research on socioeconomic problems of the dam affected population and for some of the costs of mobilization and organization. In 1981, CRAB leaders decided they needed additional resources and drafted a project proposal which was forwarded through CPT to MISEREOR, which funded it. In the fall of 1983, CRAB successfully solicited funding from Bread for the World to expand the movement. In short, the initial activists proactively reached through their existing religious-political networks to obtain funding to build and expand their movement.

### *The Construction "Atingido" as Involving Land and Human Dignity*

CPT activists and their allies framed the dam struggle in the context of their existing ideology and practice of liberation theology, the linking of faith and life, and the linking of faith and politics (Secretariado Diocesano de Pastoral 1991). Biblical references were often cited to justify the church's support for peasants' access to land in its humane, Christian view of property, that the land is a gift of God and that all men have equal access to it (CPT 1987). CPT's program of political pedagogy sought to raise political consciousness, create collective will, and transform viewpoints from fatalistic to assertive of rights (Grzybowski 1985).

Building on this tradition, the church/CRAB leaders constructed a powerful discourse of "losses" which would result from the construction of the dams. According to former movement advisor Derci Pasqualotto, who had church ties and was of Italian descent, church/CRAB leaders appealed to sentimental values of the people to mobilize them, saying that dam construction would cause flooding of homes, church and cemetery, thus creating a strong motivation to defend these community institutions.<sup>4</sup>



The message was reinforced when there was knowledge of relatives or friends who had suffered similar losses from other dam projects. This discourse of losses used by church/CRAB leadership resonated with deeply held traditions and values among the *colonos* (Scherer-Warren et al. 1988). Faillace (1990) cites the importance of religion – Catholic or Evangelical Lutheran – as *colonos* looked to the parish priest or other Catholic leaders or to the IECLB parish to enable those faced with loss of these cultural ties to help reconstruct their cultural world. This discourse of losses both reinforced *colono* identity and contributed to an emerging political identity as *atingidos*.

From the beginning, ELETROSUL and the Regional Commission confronted one another over the meaning to be given to the term "*atingido*" (Faillace 1990). For ELETROSUL, the *atingido* was the owner-operator who had legally established ties to the land. CRAB struggled with ELETROSUL over their meanings, including in its definition of *atingido* various categories of landless agriculturalists (e.g. squatters, renters, sharecroppers, indigenous populations) as well as landowners' adult children. In addition, the definition of those things which would affect people was also expanded: not only water, but also transmission lines, workers' living quarters, and the construction site (Faillace 1990:38). The more inclusive definition of *atingidos* widened the mass base of the movement: CRAB estimated that 200,000 people (40,000 families) were affected, in contrast to ELETROSUL's estimate of 14,500 (Faillace 1990:31). Faillace (1990: 38) argues that the peasants adopted the new political identity of *atingido* and used it to refer to those things which were important to them with respect to dam construction, molding it to characteristics of their social organization.

#### *Expanding the Networks: Movement Expansion*

From 1984 through 1987, CRAB continued with its class/land struggle frame and its church-linked networks, and expanded its mobilization, information-generation and alliance networking with other class/land struggle movement organizations in the region, particularly the "new" combative farmworkers unions, the landless workers movement and the Workers Party, and formed new relationships with dams resistance groups elsewhere in Brazil, helping to create networks of communication and collaboration between regions.

The Workers Party grew along with rural social movements, campaigns for direct presidential elections, and movements for agrarian reform. CRAB supported and benefitted from movement responding to the Itaparica dam in northeastern Brazil, which mobilized thousands of people and forced the utility to negotiate with them about construction and resettlement plans. The growing political openings and the example of other protests gave popular movements leverage over their opponents, and made ELETROSUL more willing to negotiate with CRAB than it would have been in another period. The debt crisis of the mid-1980s, compounded by elite divisions within the state, crippled ELETROSUL's ability effectively to implement dam construction plans; its inability to clearly inform and implement plans damaged its credibility and weakened its base of support. Under the combative leadership of a new union organizer in the region of the Itá dam and four young core activists, CRAB's organization was strengthened by institution of the General Assembly and consultations with the social base which produced a list of 39 demands. A series of direct action protests pressured ELETROSUL and maintained the enthusiasm of the masses. By 1987, the selective use of non-institutional and institutional actions had gained legitimacy for the movement organization, enabling it to obtain official recognition from the Ministry of Mines and Energy. In 1987, the combined factors of CRAB's stronger

mobilization and organization and ELETROSUL's weaknesses led to the negotiation and signing of the landmark Accord of 1987 with ELETROSUL. Among its principal provisions, the 1987 Agreement conditioned ELETROSUL's purchase of *atingido* lands on its prior offering of three options to *atingidos*: 1) land of equivalent quality and value in the immediate region or one of the three southern states; 2) cash indemnification, with *atingidos*' participation in the determination of the value of farmland and capital improvements; 3) inclusion of all landless *atingidos* (including adult children of *atingidos*) in resettlement projects. The Accord has allowed CRAB to effectively monitor ELETROSUL's actions in the Machadinho and Itá dam projects and to manage the Itá resettlement project and has often been cited as a model.

### The Construction of New Alliances and a New Ideology: 1988-1992

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the completion of the democratic transition and the shift in 1988 to the period of democratic consolidation marked a shift to a new political opportunity structure as Brazilian popular movements underwent a crisis of mobilization, the alliances formed during repression broke apart and new alliances were formed. Progressives within the Brazilian Catholic Church were weakened which, together with the increased strength of conservatives, diminished the church's support for workers' movements. The ascending phase of the cycle of protest ended with the failure of the agrarian reform movement in the 1988 Constitution and narrow defeat of the Workers Party candidate for president in 1989. The weakness of ELETROSUL and its lesser physical presence in the region further reduced mobilization of CRAB's social base.

At the same time, the international and national environmental movements were growing in power and influence. CRAB maintained contacts with *Polo Sindical* (rural trade union consortium), established in the Northeast region in 1979 to coordinate the farmworkers' struggle with the Federal regional power company over the Itaparica Dam project. Through its contacts with *Polo Sindical*, CRAB came into contact with national and international NGOs as a transnational environmental advocacy network (Keck and Sikkink 1998:132) was being formed. In this context, CRAB leadership and core activists went through a process of ideological reconstruction to integrate land struggle and ecology themes and reframed the dams issue in political ecology terms to bring it into alliance with the newly-constructed political ecology branch of the environmental movement. On CRAB's side, the product was a new synthetic ideology that positioned it to play an important bridging role between the class-based rural movements and the urban-based environmental movements.

### *Land Struggles and Political Ecology*

Prior to 1985, ecology movements and anti-dam struggles followed different paths: the former was peasant-based and focused on the land struggle, while the latter was urban-based and directed at industrial pollution. Ironically, before 1985, only the international lending agencies and, in some situations, the Brazilian electric sector, considered both the ecology movement and the anti-dams movement as part of the environmentalist movement, because they both opposed "progress." In late 1983, the anti-dams movement in the Uruguai River Basin took a position of outright opposition to dam construction, deeply questioning the need for more electric energy and thus challenging the development model, which led it to be accused of being opposed to progress (Vianna 1990:6). The ecology movement, which in many instances prevented the installation of polluting industries and agro-industrial

complexes, was criticized in similar fashion. For example, the tanning industry of the Rio do Sinos Valley of Rio Grande do Sul State accused the environmental NGO Union for Natural Environment Protection (UPAN) of being anti-progress<sup>5</sup>. Despite their common opponents, the anti-dams movement and the environmental movement did not initially form an alliance in southern Brazil, although this later became one basis for their cooperation.

CRAB's reframing of the dams issue was mediated through its ties to other land struggle movements in Brazil. Although CRAB itself remained entirely rooted in its land/imperialism frame until 1989, Brazil's ecology movement had already begun to influence other land and dam struggles in Brazil around 1985. By 1986, the ecology movement in Brazil adopted a political ecology<sup>6</sup> ideology (Viola 1987).

A crucial factor in the political ecology turn in Latin America was the Rubber Tappers Movement, which had been fighting since 1975 to guarantee land use rights and improve the living standards of forest peoples in the Amazon region, framing themselves as a land/class movement. In the early 1980s, the rubber tappers faced increasing pressure from deforestation for cattle ranching and agriculture. In 1983 a small network of activists and organizations based in Washington, D.C. began to target multilateral bank lending in developing countries, choosing Brazil's Polonoeste Project in the Amazon as one of the initial targets (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 135). In 1985, the group established contact with Chico Mendes, leader of the Acre rubber tappers. That same year a meeting was held in Brasília as a calculated effort of the Rubber Tappers "to break out of regional isolation and to seek new allies nationally and internationally" (Schwartzman 1991:406). The result of the meeting was the creation of a National Council of Rubber Tappers (CNS) and the launching of the extractive reserves proposal which called for land to be set aside for traditional sustainable land uses. This proposal allied the Rubber Tappers with indigenous groups in the area and, through them, brought ties to the ecologists. The strategic importance of the Rubber Tappers movement and its objectives, its organizational capabilities and its proactive characteristics attracted the support of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). In this way, the Rubber Tappers were able to forge an alliance of their rural peasant-based struggle with urban segments of civil society, broadening the social and political base of the movement (Vianna 1990:6). By 1988, the Rubber Tappers movement had explicitly adopted an ecological discourse.

A similar articulation began in 1985 between the *Polo Sindical* and EDF. The active mobilization of *Polo Sindical* attracted environmentalist attention in the turn to political ecology, and movement activists came into communication with EDF and the World Bank which, in turn, pressured the utility to provide better compensation and resettlement guarantees as conditions on a \$500 million loan to Brazil for the electric power sector. The *Polo Sindical's* written public denunciation of the northeast utility was widely circulated among international environmental NGOs and the World Bank and received a great deal of attention.

CRAB leaders had close ties to the *Polo Sindical* and were fully informed about the growing involvement of the EDF in the Itaparica struggle. Similarly, they were aware of the importance of the Rubber Tappers Movement (Dalla Costa 1988) and its implications for broader coalitions for land struggles. However, the involvement of environmental NGOs came more slowly to the south. CRAB first met with World Bank investigators in 1986 and the negotiations for World Bank loans gave them bargaining power with ELETROSUL, but CRAB was not directly influential in the environmental

movement and did not adopt ecological frames until after 1988. Their ultimate shift in frames was the result of a protracted and self-conscious process of ideology reconstruction and political education of central leadership, core activists and segments of their mass base.

In short, the Rubber Tappers movement initiated the turn to political ecology among land struggle movements in Brazil, influencing the *Polo Sindical* and then CRAB. Political ecology developed from the two-way interactions between international environmentalists and local activists, and as much involved the "classing" of environmentalism (that is, its need to recognize human need as part of the environment) as the "greening" of land struggle issues.

### *The Greening of CRAB: 1988-1992*

Although CRAB was well aware of the development of political ecology in other regions, its first direct link with environmental NGOs did not occur until 1988, when the young CRAB leader Luiz Dalla Costa attended an international conference in San Francisco sponsored by the International Rivers Network (IRN) about the construction of large hydroelectric dams, and had additional contacts with major environmental NGOs and World Bank officials. His report to the movement on these activities emphasized the importance of proposals for network construction in Brazil (with groups such as the Rubber Tappers movement and environmental NGOs), other Latin American countries and internationally to apply pressure to the multilateral banks and national governments in opposition to large dams (Dalla Costa 1988). Conference participant Carlos Aveline, President of UPAN (Union for Natural Environmental Protection), was chosen to initiate contacts for the Latin American network and, in a UPAN publication, called on Latin American ecological entities to join the network as well as to support CRAB and its initiatives to organize a national anti-dams movement (Aveline and Hartman 1988). Important outcomes of this conference for CRAB were the establishment of local-national-international ties and growth of the movement organization's capacity to influence the creation of national and transnational advocacy networks opposed to large dams.

Nevertheless, even through 1989, a CRAB publication by an important left intellectual avoided the ecology frame and characterized large dams as a geopolitical strategy for Brazilian "subimperialism" to control rich natural resources in the interests of guaranteeing natural resource supply to US transnational industries (Schilling 1989).

The reconstruction of CRAB's ideology into political ecology occurred largely in late 1989 and 1990. In October 1989, CRAB sponsored a two-day workshop on environmental legislation for *atingidos* and movement leaders, with participation by movement advisors from CEDI (Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information), a Brazilian NGO based in Rio de Janeiro, which was important for land struggle issues in Brazil and had also maintained close contacts with US environmental NGOs (Schwartzman, 1991:410). In July, 1990, two days of seminar and discussions were held on ecology and the ecology movement. Consultant-advisor Aurélio Vianna, of CEDI, also a graduate researcher on dam-affected people, helped prepare a working paper (CRAB 1989) for didactic use in the 1989 workshop, participated as advisor in both events (CRAB 19990) and wrote an article on these training sessions (Vianna 1990). These documents reveal the process of ideological reconstruction and political education to integrate ecology and land struggle themes. There were simplified technical explanations about environmental legislation (CRAB 1989) and discussion about the strategic uses of the environmental legislation by the anti-dams movement, followed by a discussion of

the relation between CRAB and the struggle for the land and the environment. Summarizing, first, enduring values were validated, and the grassroots struggle for the land was affirmed as the principal issue of the movement's mobilization. Second, the reality of a change in the political opportunity structure was identified: the defeat of agrarian reform in the new constitution required social movements to develop new strategies to "guarantee resistance and advances in the struggle for the land" (CRAB 1989). Third, using as an example the indiscriminate use of pesticides by local agriculturalists, ecology was shown to be relevant to the improvement of living conditions of the population, and thus linked to core values. The example of the Rubber Tappers movement (CRAB 1990, Vianna 1990:6) was fundamental as a precedent for linking the class-based land rights struggle with the universal values of the ecology movement. This NGO/CRAB alignment of the land struggle and ecology frames did not signify the replacement of Marxist discourse, but rather its incorporation into a political ecology master frame, which could "facilitate alliances with ecology movements with an urban base" (Vianna 1990:7-8).

However frame alignment between NGOs and CRAB leadership was not sufficient. For the political ecology frame to mobilize core leaders and activists it had to demonstrate not only its potency as a prognosis of what to do, and its motivating rationale for these leaders to take action, but also be relevant to their experiences. Regardless of the importance of CRAB's strategic role as a political ecology movement, CRAB's popular legitimacy, both locally and with the NGOs, depended on its mass base.

Nevertheless, the proposed frame alignment with CRAB's mass base was a more difficult challenge. Reduced investment funds limited ELETROSUL's dam construction activities to the Itá dam site, reducing CRAB's mass base and mobilization principally to the Itá area and the resettlement project in Paraná State. In this context, movement leadership devised several strategies which sought to relate and adapt the *colono* way of life to an alternative style of development which was not environmentally destructive: first, courses and publications for agriculturalists, teachers and youth in environmental education, which obtained sustained funding from the Brazilian National Foundation for the Environment; second, a project for the development of sustainable peasant agriculture by a consortium of four rural unions (Sindicatos n.d.), for which funding was obtained from the NGO of Luxemburg, ASTM (Action, Solidarité Tiers Monde, Third World Solidarity Action); third, the resettlement project's emphasis on education, training and technical assistance in agroecology, particularly for younger *colonos*. Although CRAB leadership recognized that "it is impossible today to make a *colono* feel like an ecologist" (CRAB 1990), by giving priority to resettlement, youth and agroecology, the movement was attempting to integrate core values with the new ideology by investing in the "reconstruction of the *colonos*' way of life, or construction of a new way of life which, however, maintained family and community ties with physical space and with the environment" (Vianna et al. 1990:54).

CRAB's synthesis of land struggle and class ideologies with ecology put it in an important structural position in meetings in 1991 and 1992 in preparation for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or Rio-92). In these meetings, CRAB and its allies successfully persuaded environmentalist organizations to agree to permit participation in their Forum by other movement organizations which lacked an explicit ecological perspective, thus opening

the way to links and alliances between the environmental movement and class-based organizations, including CPT, the labor unions, and the landless rural workers movements.<sup>7</sup>

Since 1991, CRAB has taken a leadership role in the national anti-dam organization, MAB, while achieving strategic mobilization in response to localized dam projects as the regional chapter MAB-Sul. In March 1997, MAB and MAB-Sul and the International Rivers Network played lead roles in convening representatives from twenty countries at the First International Meeting of People Affected by Dams in Curitiba, the capital city of Paraná State. In 1998, MAB and MAB-Sul were involved in plans for public hearings in Brazil in 1999 by the recently created World Commission on Dams.

### Conclusions

The story of the anti-dam movement in southern Brazil illustrates several general processes important to the linkages between local mobilizations and international social movements. First, the evolving and multidimensional local and national political opportunity structures were always important. Dam resistance was affected by the particular social and economic structures in each locale, by the overall repressiveness of the government in different phases of authoritarianism and democratization, by the phase of a cycle of protest, by economic and political factors which affected the efficiency and strength of the electrical utility, and by international processes and events which affected the availability of loans to support major hydroelectric projects.

Secondly, local struggles never occurred in a vacuum, but drew on what we have come to call the "preexisting" organizational structures and ideologies, that is, the structures and ideologies they inherited from previous events and experiences. In southern Brazil, the local people who had the capacity to respond to the threat of dam construction were those who were tied into external communication networks. It was the external ties which gave them access to information about plans for dams and about the bad experiences other communities had had with compensation and resettlement. Similarly, it was the embeddedness of the local activists as organic intellectuals in the international religious/political networks of the progressive church that fed their ideological understanding of the needs of their communities and the ways of addressing those needs through protest and resistance. Finally, it was their location in the social networks of the international progressive church that gave them access to the resources necessary to pursue their program.

Thirdly, the initiative for protest and resistance always began with local people, as did the initiative to seek external resources. External agents were reactive, responding to requests or proposals, or entering an area after the disruption had started. Fourthly, and relatedly, interchange between local activists and international organizations and movements was always two-way. The master ideologies of liberation theology and, later, political ecology, certainly affected the thinking of local people, but also the struggles and needs of poor peasants influenced the international movement of the progressive church toward liberation theology and the option for the poor and, later, the shift of the international environmental movement toward political ecology. Local activists needed support and resources from outsiders to help them in their struggles with local elites, but the progressive church and the international NGOs had just as much need for the active grassroots participation and innovations of local groups. Fifth, these local-national-international ties, first to the progressive church on the land

struggle and later to the ecology movement, constituted the formation of transnational advocacy networks which provided leverage in negotiations with the Brazilian government.

Finally, frame alignment processes were inextricably linked to the construction and reconstruction of social networks and complex ideologies, and the depth of these processes need to be fully acknowledged if they are to be understood. Opponents of movements often point to apparent inconsistencies or changes in movement ideologies as evidence of their superficiality, but this is rarely a fair characterization of the actual belief systems of committed activists in any movement. In this case, the earlier construction of liberation theology was itself a deep process of ideological reconstruction involving multiplex influence networks between the needs and struggles of the world's poor and Latin American and European religious leaders. By constructing dam resistance as a land struggle, the early CRAB and CPT activists drew on their core values and beliefs in the justifying ideology and resources of the progressive church and positioned the anti-dam movement in alliance with other rural land struggles. For eight years, this ideology sustained a growing and active mobilization. When the political opportunity structure changed at the end of the democratic transition, activists needed ways to find new allies, and the shift to a political ecology frame provided the basis for land defense movements to obtain resourceful urban and international allies. However, this change could not be, and was not, casual or superficial. It required a deep examination and integration of core values into the new ideology so that it could justify the actions of central leaders and core activists. Several years of discussions were necessary, and the new ideology was a synthesis that held to the core values and imperatives of the old class and Bible-based defense of land while encompassing the new ecology-based defense of land. This new ideology, in turn, influenced the international actors who were in contact with the local activists and, in its turn, became the basis for the creation of new networks and alliance structures.

Each specific case is, of course, unique, and no claim is made that the specific configuration of events found in this case will be replicated in all cases. But the case materials point to the ways in which we may expect to see agency, initiative, and influence among local actors, even as they are embedded in, and influenced by, larger transnational movement networks and political opportunity structures.

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ambiente."

## NOTES

1. We wish to acknowledge financial support from Brazilian agency CNPq, for Ph.D. fellowship and thesis research; and financial support from University of Wisconsin-Madison Departments of Rural Sociology and Sociology for field research and the cooperation of many Brazilian people affected by dams, movement activists and researchers.
2. Space does not permit a detailed review of the enormous literature on political opportunity. For recent reviews, see Tarrow (1998) and the essays in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald (1996).
3. Originally the term *colonos* described the largely-Protestant German, and largely-Catholic Italian and Polish immigrants who arrived in several waves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and acquired small tracts of land in government or private-sponsored colonization projects in the region and maintained commercial as well as subsistence agricultural production. Today, the term *colonos* refers to the several types of agricultural smallholders whose production is based on family labor: small owner-operators, sharecroppers, renters, squatters (Grzybowski 1985:250), within a diversified cash-crop system.
4. Derci Pasqualotto interview, October 26, 1992, Florianópolis.
5. Carlos Aveline telephone interview, December 22, 1998, Brasília.
6. See Viola (1987) for a detailed discussion of political ecology in the context of the evolution of the ecology movement in Brazil. It differs from earlier preservationist and conservationists ideologies in its focus on the human and social dimensions of nature-society relations, particularly social injustice. For the Brazilian Left, political ecology represented the classing of ecology (Waldman 1988).
7. Aurélio Vianna interview, October 21, 1992, Rio de Janeiro.

**Figure 1** – United States of Brazil, Showing Uruguai River Basin



Source: *Bacia Hidrográfica do Rio Uruguai – Estudo de Inventário Hidroenergético* (1979).

**Figure 2.** Uruguai River Basin.  
Impact Area of ELETROSUL's Dams Projects



Source: *Bacia Hidrográfica do Rio Uruguai – Estudo de Inventário Hidroenergético* (1979).