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8 Towards a Synthetic Analytical Framework for Understanding Interaction in Environmental Networks

This chapter develops and applies a synthetic analytical framework for merging social movement theories in order to provide a more rounded explanation for interaction in environmental networks. To begin with, I recap on some of the strengths and weaknesses of previous theorizing. Next, I flesh out three key reasons for merging social movement theory to understand interaction in environmental networks: first, environmental networks include organizations that have formal and informal structures; second, many environmental organizations are hybrids that are neither pure pressure groups, as implied by some aspects of resource mobilization theory, nor informally organized cultural vanguards as anticipated by new social movement theory; and third, there is actually a good deal of complementarity. After that, I evaluate a significant attempt to unite the theories: *The Dynamics of Contention* research programme of McAdam et al. (2001). Although this programme can be commended for its attempt to create a dynamic model drawing on a broad range of theoretical insights, there remains a number of issues with the approach. In the context of this book, the most significant issue is the approach's attempt to understand the *conditions* that lead to particular forms of *contention*. The authors' emphasis on contention means that the underlying networking dynamics are underplayed, or, where they are discussed, that they are used as predictor variables for understanding contention. The purpose of this book, instead, has been to consider networks as the outcome variable to be explained. As I argued in the 'Introduction', a focus on contention at the expense of networks prioritizes the visible at the expense of important behind-the-scenes work that takes place among and between environmental organizations (Melucci 1989: 44).

To develop a new synthesis better suited to my research focus than the *Dynamics of Contention* approach, I draw on the concept of 'systemism' (see Chapter 1 and Bunge 1997), which considers interaction in environmental networks to be a product of a web of relations between and among environmental organizations, the polity, other campaign targets (if appropriate) and individuals. None of the theories

discussed thus far – not excepting the *Dynamics of Contention* programme – merge all of these actors into a single analytical framework. This is despite the fact that, as illustrated by the sum of Chapters 4–7, each type of actor is clearly important in shaping environmental networks.

As well as bringing together all the different actors that shape environmental networks, I also emphasize the importance of considering two key forms of social action. Recall that resource mobilization theory has emphasized the strategic at the expense of the normative, and that new social movement theory does the opposite. Thus, as Habermas (1984) alludes to in his theory of social action, it is important in any synthetic analytical framework not only to consider the broader web of relations, but also to focus on both strategic and normative actions. I wind up the chapter by discussing campaigns against climate change and aviation expansion, which are illustrative of the framework’s explanatory potential.

Limitations of social movement theories

There are three main types of limitations to the classic social movement theories that were discussed in Chapters 4–7. Some have limited scope, others generalize, and almost all of them adopt a synchronic and linear approach rather than a dynamic one. There are two types of limitations of scope, summarized in Table 8.1. One refers to the type of social action considered by the theories, the other to the actors included. With regard to social action, resource mobilization theory and political

Table 8.1 The scope of existing social movement theories

Theory	Social action		Actors involved			
	Strategic	Normative	Individuals	Organizations	Targets	Polity
Resource mobilization	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Political opportunity/ process	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
New social movement theory	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

Note: A ‘Yes’ indicates that these forms of social action and actors are covered by the theory, a ‘No’ indicates that they are not.

opportunity theories prioritize the strategic over the normative; and new social movement theory ignores the strategic but lauds the normative.

With reference to the types of actors considered, many accounts of political opportunity/process theory can be charged with being overly statist. They focus purely on interactions between social movement organizations and the polity. By and large, they ignore political opportunities at the local or transnational level (with the exception of Van der Heijden 2006). Opportunities to challenge other actors like corporations or even to shape cultural frameworks are almost entirely overlooked. Resource mobilization theory gives some emphasis to relationships between organizations, and, at the micro-level, at how individuals can be motivated to participate in collective action. But it does not allow consideration of how environmental organizations interact with the broader polity.

The charge of overgeneralizing can be levelled at certain branches of new social movement theory and macro-political opportunity structure theorizing. Both have tended to assume that a set of very general characteristics of a society or polity (respectively) lead to homogenous social movements within nations. While new social movement theorists have assumed that general shifts in society result in culturally oriented movements across western democracies, broad-brush approaches to political opportunity theory have implied that structural conditions can lead to differences in movements between (but importantly not within) countries. Both, of course, do terrible injustice to the diversity of actors within movements, and also to the differences between different movements and organizations within a single country. When looking beyond what might be thought of as movements to broader environmental networks, these problems are more pronounced. Although new social movement theorists have done much work emphasizing that collective identity is a process, that process is often thought to arise in response to a set of relatively static variables that are actually themselves dynamic and interactive.

Learning lessons from previous theorizing, we need to search for an approach that is not confined in scope and does not overgeneralize. It should facilitate a dynamic approach, enabling explanation of how organizations in environmental networks interact during episodes (visible moments of contention) *and* during latency (the lulls between the visible moments). Most importantly, any attempt to merge the theories requires not only consideration of different types of social action (strategic *and* normative), but also the interactions between a variety of actors: the polity, other campaign targets, environmental organizations *and* individuals. This does not mean that we need to wipe the slate clean and start from scratch, for useful concepts abound in many of the theories that comprise the classic social movement agenda discussed in previous chapters. However, these useful concepts do need to be

brought together into a more coherent framework to allow them to work for us. But why should concepts from different theories be integrated?

Why integrate social movement theories?

Environmental networks include new social movement(ish) organizations and pressure groups

Some studies of the environmental movement have claimed that new social movement theory is the most applicable theoretical lens through which to view radical environmental organizations like Earth First! (see e.g. Dalton 1994), and that resource mobilization theory is most useful for interpreting the actions of bureaucratically structured organizations or 'protest businesses', such as Friends of the Earth (Jordan and Maloney 1997). This is true to the extent that radical environmental organizations are more likely to pose a systemic challenge to the state and develop encompassing collective identities (Chapter 7), and 'protest businesses' are more likely to be concerned about organizational maintenance as they have offices and staff to pay for (Chapter 4). The evidence suggests that because these two types of environmental organizations exist within environmental networks, we need to draw on both resource mobilization and new social movement theories.

Environmental organizations diverge from ideal types

There is plenty of evidence that protest-business type organizations often act rationally (see e.g. Chapter 4). But the suggestion that organizational maintenance the only priority of formally organized campaign groups, as implied by Jordan and Maloney (1997), could be said to stretch the explanation too far in the direction of egotistical rationality. For instance, although Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace both have carefully crafted public images to consider (Chapter 4), they are not-for-profit initiatives increasingly making a conscious effort to become involved with and/or support local campaign initiatives (Saunders 2007b). Although Friends of the Earth's last Five-year plan (2003–8) contained details about how it wanted to improve its public profile through its campaign efforts, there was much more detail in the plan about how it was seeking to bring about environmental improvements than about its efforts to maintain itself and its reputation. Large environmental organizations, both reformist and conservationist, clearly have a priority to improve the environment. While organizational maintenance is necessary to sustain their efforts, it is clearly ancillary to the primary aim of protecting the environment.

In practice, environmental organizations combine formal and informal organizational structure and mix instrumental and cultural actions. For example, despite its best attempts to take a cultural approach, a This Land is Ours protest camp on the

Thames bank in Wandsworth was forced to take a course of instrumental action because its challenge was best directed towards the planning system (Halfacree 1999). Even the Climate Camp, which generally eschews challenging formal institutions of the state, has, against the wishes of its anti-authoritarian founders, engaged in lobbying activities as part of its attempt to broaden its participant base (Woodsworth 2008; Saunders 2012). Although cultural reproduction and freedom of expression are important within protest camps, some aspects of their actions are inevitably somewhat instrumentally oriented.

Complementarity of the theories

While resource mobilization and new social movement theories have commonly been juxtaposed against one another, they do actually share a number of key variables. This is particularly the case if we extend the definition of what it means to be 'rational' to include emotion and norms. While it is not always economically rational to become an environmental activist, it might be emotionally rational to do so. Furthermore, all environmental organizations require resources of some sort, and they employ a degree of rationality in their attempts to acquire such resources. While instrumentally oriented organizations may seek to build up and maintain financial resources, new social movement type organizations invoke solidarity to maintain affinity groups. It is evident that social movement theorists have made this link because of the frequently cited exposition that symbolic *and* solidaristic incentives can act as selective incentives that motivate social movement participation (see e.g. Johnston et al. 1994: 18). Resources – whether money, people or even ideas – play a significant role in both instrumental and cultural theories.

A related link between formal and new social movement agents is that both spend time on some form of maintenance. For radicals this might entail maintenance of a collective identity and sense of solidarity, and for formal organizations this may constitute maintenance of its staff base and office space. In practice, both types of maintenance are important to environmental organizations, even if variably. Even Melucci (1985: 729), in his theory heavily oriented towards new social movements, made links between different theoretical approaches. 'Action', of new social movements he wrote, 'has to be viewed as interplay of aims, *resources* and *obstacles*, as a purposive orientation which is set up within a systematic field of *possibilities and limits*' (emphasis added). 'Resources' clearly chimes with resource mobilization theory. And 'obstacles' and 'possibilities and limits' can be linked to political opportunity/process theory. Hence, it becomes difficult to disagree with Dalton's (1994: 10–11) point, in specific reference to the environmental movement, that an identity-oriented (new social movement) and resource mobilization approach are 'essentially complementary'. To this, we must add the political opportunity/

process approach, which complements new social movement and resource mobilization theories further. But political opportunity/process theory does need to some extent to be pulled away from its statist/structural bent to be of much help to us (Chapter 5).

As we discovered in Chapter 5, the political opportunity structure in the United Kingdom has been stable for a number of years. Neither the form of electoral representation nor the degree of centralization has changed significantly. Therefore structural political variables cannot be used to explain the changing nature of the British environmentalism (e.g. the dramatic rise in direct action in the early 1990s), or the configuration of relationships between environmental organizations. Neither can structural variables be used to explain variation in the relative openness of the polity depending on: (a) the issue at hand; and (b) the status of the environmental organization demanding the change. Therefore, the approach needs to be modified. It needs to be made more dynamic in order to improve its ability to understand interaction in environmental networks. In Chapter 5, I began to do this by suggesting that we consider also the more dynamic and contingent aspects of political opportunities by focusing on policy windows, democratic dead ends and organizations' location on the insider-outsider continuum.

Thus, each of the theories discussed in this book contributes something to our understanding of interaction in environmental networks. To fill in all the cells of Table 8.1 with yeses – that is to say something useful about strategic and normative actions and incorporate the influence of a range of social actors – such a merging is necessary. This means that theory bashing – at least to the point of entirely dismissing schools of thought – is mostly avoided in this book. Indeed, this discussion has not intended to overlook the contributions from collective behaviour theorists (Chapter 1). It is merely the case that many of the useful aspects of those theories – focusing on the receptiveness of government, the role of key movers and shakers, 'milling' and the development of a 'we-consciousness' – are taken up by political opportunity/process and new social movement scholars (Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Aspects of many extant social movement theories – including collective behaviour – are taken up by McAdam et al. (2001) in their *Dynamics of Contention* research programme. But how do they merge the theories? And what have been the strengths and weaknesses of their approach?

The *Dynamics of Contention*

In *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam et al. (2001), criticized the classic social movement agenda for being too static, ignoring the interplay between actors, reducing complexity to framing or strategic calculation and compartmentalizing

social movements.¹ While they may have come down a little too hard against existing theoretical work on social movements, including their own (Opp 2009: 312), they also share with me an insistence 'on the uselessness of choosing among culturalist, rationalist and structuralist approaches to contentious politics' (305). To address their criticisms of earlier social movement theorizing, they state that they 'adopted insights from all three where we found them useful' (ibid.). They used these insights to build a research programme they claimed had 'more dynamics, more relational analyses and more causal analogies' (ibid.). This is the key reason why appraising and building upon their research programme is a must for the study of environmental networks. At least on the surface, it seems ideally suited for addressing some of the limitations of theories discussed thus far. Another key aim of theirs – which is well beyond the scope of this book – was to try to generate causal mechanisms that work for a whole series of forms of political contention that they call 'contentious politics'. This took them beyond social movements to look also at democratization and revolutions. Their basic argument is that episodes – or spells of contention – result from two or more processes, which are comprized of mechanisms. Mechanisms are defined as 'a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations' (McAdam et al. 2001: 24). Such mechanisms, as they endeavour to show with their paired comparisons of very different episodes, appear evident across a broad range of forms of political contention. The concatenation of mechanisms in different combinations results in processes thought to give shape and form to contention. 'Processes' combine environmental, cognitive and relational mechanisms (McAdam and Tarrow 2010: 531) and are defined as 'regular sequences of . . . mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements' (McAdam et al. 2001: 24). The process of polarization, for example, is defined as the 'widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and the gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors towards one, the other, or both extremes' (322). This process, which quite closely resembles relations between different factions in US environmentalism (see Conclusion), 'combines mechanisms of opportunity/threat spirals, competition, category formation and the omnipresent brokerage' (ibid.). To spell out the jargon: *Opportunity/threat spirals* consist of sequences of political changes that are interpreted by challengers, resulting in collective action followed by the counteraction of members of the polity, causing future political changes and so on. In other words, it can be viewed as a dynamic way of interpreting political opportunities. *Competition* involves different factions trying to gain allies and outbid competitors, as presupposed by resource mobilization theory. *Category formation* creates divisions between a 'we' and a 'them'. This should ring a bell in relation to

the new social movement theory I discussed in Chapter 7. And *brokerage* is the linking of two social sites that puts the previously disconnected into contact with one another, perhaps similar to the concept of ‘milling’ in collective behaviour theory (Turner and Killian 1957).

In short, then, mechanisms such as these are thought to join together in certain configurations to produce processes – like polarization – that shape episodes of contention. However, mechanisms sometimes seem work on their own without joining together to create processes. As I explore later, this has contributed to confusion over what the authors mean by ‘mechanisms’ and ‘processes’. Let me first provide an example of the role of mechanisms in shaping a particular episode of collective action.

McAdam et al. (2001) use their mechanistic approach to uncover why contention led to civil war during the American Revolution in the 1800s, but to a peaceful transition to democracy in Spain in 1973, despite the assassination of dictatorial president Franco. They identify four mechanisms in the two cases: (1) brokerage (defined above); (2) identity shift, which involves the moving of identity markers; (3) radicalization, which they conceptualize as ‘increasing contradictions at one or both extremes of a political continuum’ that ‘drive political actors between the extremes into clear alliance’ (189); and (4) convergence, which is another label for the radical flank effect, whereby the more radical actors make the demands of the less radical appear increasingly acceptable to policymakers. They conclude that the relational mechanisms ‘combined with very different environmental mechanisms to produce divergent outcomes’ (162). In the US case, they identified brokerage only within the oppositional forces, whereas in Spain they found evidence of brokerage between challengers and members. They claim that identities of the US challengers and members were juxtaposed, whereas they find evidence of identity shifts among members in Spain. And while they found radicalization of views in the United States, they considered that in Spain, radicalization was tempered by convergence.

Evaluating the Dynamics of Contention

As McAdam and Tarrow (2010: 530) themselves admit, ‘When it appeared in 2001, *Dynamics of Contention* was hardly greeted with universal acclaim by the fraternity of social movement scholars.’ My critique centres on the book’s apparent lack of focus, and charges the authors of having a structural bent and for, despite their best intentions, creating a somewhat linear theory. But the most damning criticisms point to the programme’s lack of conceptual clarity and its sketchy guidance on how to apply the programme to one’s own research. In accordance with what we would expect given the history of theory bashing in social movement studies, McAdam and

Tarrow (2010: 530) claim that ‘scholars with sunk intellectual capital in a particular approach are always hard to convince’. Nevertheless, McAdam and Tarrow (2010: 350) have the modesty to accept that ‘part of the fault was . . . our own’. They have admitted that the work was not theoretically specific, that they looked at too many case studies across a broad array of regime types and that they bombarded readers with 21 pages of references and over 20 mechanisms which they ‘tossed off with little attempt at explanation or operationalization’ (ibid.). Let us consider the criticisms raised against McAdam et al.’s work in a little more detail.

Broad but narrow: contentious politics restricted to state focused episodes

Regarding charges of a lack of focus, scholars have questioned the possibility of crafting a research programme to shape the entire field of contentious politics, with some seeing it as a blatant, if undesirable, attempt to dominate the field (Flacks 2003). A related worry is that the approach, rather like collective behaviour theory (Chapter 1), has become too ‘grand’ to effectively address social movements. It falls short of effectively addressing social movements because of its focus on contention. In terms of social movements, this boils down to emphasis on visible contention (read ‘protest’) directed only at the state. Thus, the approach ignores the underlying dynamics of social movements, their cultural elements and some of the more mundane actions that social movements engage in, such as trying to shift public opinion, organizing petitions or lobbying ministers. Anti-corporate campaigns, like those waged by the Environmental Direct Action Group consequently fall outside of McAdam et al.’s radar.

Although McAdam et al. attempt to reorient the study of contentious politics away from episodes to mechanisms and processes, they end up trying to understand only the mechanisms that (sometimes) lead to processes that (always it seems) result in episodes. Thus, their key focus remains episodes. This is not a problem per se, but it means that by trying to understand only the emergence of visible contention, the mechanisms at work in networks that sustain movements during periods of latency are lost. The lack of emphasis they give to periods of latency means also that they effectively lack a control group in which there is no contention with which to compare their cases of contention; in other words, who is to say if their mechanisms at work in the absence of contention? This is important because if their mechanisms are activated outside of periods of contention then their claim to have identified causality is exaggerated. Furthermore, their definition of contention – as interaction between challengers and members – means that they have restricted their focus to political actors and consequently overlook the cultural movements that new social movement scholars have been writing about for decades (Chapters 7 and 8).

The late Charles Tilly defended McAdam et al.'s apparent ignorance of contention targeting culture, corporations, public opinion, media and so on, by stating that he and his fellow authors needed to find a way to delineate the study. As Tilly said in interview with Anne Mische, 'The exposition would become unmanageable if we said we're looking at every form of contention everywhere' (Mische and Tilly 2003: 90). This is a good justification, but why did they not look at a range of forms of *social movement* instead of broadening out to include other forms of contention? Unfortunately, given that they ignore cultural movements, what really stands out here is that their attempt to merge aspects of the cultural approach has fallen well short of its aspirations. Furthermore, even though they claimed to build in cognitive mechanisms that speak to cultural elements of new social movement theory, their presentation of them has been criticized for being 'patently structural' (Platt 2004: 112), and for belittling human agency (Jasper 2010: 968). As Platt (2004: 113) explains:

Having theoretically attributed cultural agency . . . to activists in theory . . . they cannot shut down their volition by tying them to structural networks or by capriciously reclaiming the structural determination of their thinking and consciousness.

New labels for old ideas: the problem of linearity remains

Their structural bent partly explains a tendency to continue to treat dynamic mechanisms as linear processes. Unfortunately, this also leads to the suspicion that they have done little more than apply new labels to old theoretical ideas. The move from 'certification' to 'decertification' – whereby challengers lose the validation of authorities – for example, is presented as straightforwardly linear. It assumes that decertification follows certification, precluding a change back the other way, or the possibility to be willingly never certified (what I elsewhere in this book call 'ideological outsiders' – see Chapter 5). There is also an assumption that an actor (or group of actors) will be certified on all of the issues that (s)he/it works on. Unfortunately, the concept of certification is not dynamic enough to deal with a group like Friends of the Earth, which could be said to be certified only on some of the issues it works on some of the time (Chapter 5). If we have things McAdam et al.'s way, contention is to be reduced to a single episode on a single issue, targeted at a single authority. Of course, the reality of contention is much more sophisticated than that. McAdam et al.'s concept of 'brokerage' seems even more linear, for there is no counter process of de-brokerage, and the possibility to reconnect latent links is ignored, for brokerage is, in McAdam et al.'s terms, used to refer to the linking of *previously disconnected* actors.

The concept of centralized brokerage, which is ill defined but seems to mean interaction with authorities, was used to explain why violence occurred in the Kenyan Mau Mau Rebellion, but not in the Filipino Yellow Revolution. In other words, in the Philippines – the case in which the state facilitated protest – the transition to democracy was peaceful. In Kenya, where the state actively repressed protest, violence erupted. In this case, as in many others throughout the book, it is hard to see how the mechanistic process gives us any added value from the standard structural approach to political opportunities (see Chapter 5). Similarly, the mechanism of category formation is little different from the ‘we-them’ distinctions that new social movement theorists have repeatedly discussed. And the mechanism of competition has been very clearly articulated by resource mobilization theorists.

Conceptual issues

Let us move on to look at more fundamental conceptual issues. According to Jasper (2010: 967), ‘The main weakness was how the authors defined – or didn’t define – mechanisms’. The authors themselves admit that calling mechanisms ‘events’ was confusing. In a subsequent rendition (McAdam and Tarrow [2011: 4], emphasis added), they replace ‘a delimited class of *events* . . .’ with ‘delimited *changes* . . .’ in their definition of a mechanism. This, however, does not solve a more fundamental set of problems. Nowhere is the difference between a mechanism and a process made explicit. Thus, processes and mechanisms are sometimes treated synonymously. Mechanisms sometimes coalesce into processes, and sometimes they seem to do their work alone (see the paired comparison of the American and Spanish revolutions that I briefly discussed above as an example). Furthermore, the score of mechanisms listed are not mutually exclusive; in the case of the Yellow Revolution, their discussion of what they call social appropriation (which seems to be a new label for mobilizing structures) appears to differ little from what they elsewhere call ‘brokerage’. And the process of polarization seems almost indistinct from the mechanism they call category shift, which involves identities coalescing and the categorization of social groups into a distinct ‘we’ and ‘them’. To add to the confusion, processes (rather than mechanisms) sometimes lead to other processes. For example, the *process* of scale-shift is thought to lead to the *process* of parliamentarization. This results in mixing of the structural and agential levels, not to mention the organizational level. As Welskopp (2004: 128) notes with reference to the process of ‘identity shift’:

it is by no means clear how, at which level, and when ‘identity shift’ occurs and how it can be wrought into a broad social movement. Are we facing micro-processes that accumulate into macro dynamics? Are we looking for

macro-effects of micro-change? Do we explain macro-processes by micro-foundations?

McAdam et al. (2001) leave these as open questions.

Methodological issues

Another possible weakness is that McAdam et al. have reconstructed episodes of contention by relying on others' accounts of those episodes. The secondary accounts they refer to could have a peculiar historiographical bent that may miss allusion to mechanisms that did actually play a role in generating contention. The conceptual confusion combined with their reliance on secondary sources makes it difficult to understand how mechanisms were identified by McAdam et al., and nigh on impossible to apply the methodology to one's own research. As Flacks (2003: 101) suggests, 'Why and how these [mechanisms] have been selected and named is obscure.'

In a 2008 article, McAdam et al. seek to redress this by offering 'concrete demonstrations concerning how to identify coherent mechanisms' (309). However, their proposed methodology is disappointing. They give examples of three methodological processes and end up recommending triangulation. One of the three methods involves use of systematic event analysis to *understand* the process of scale-shift. Note the unhelpful shift here from trying to *identify* mechanisms expressed in the aims of their article, to the actual practice of trying to *understand* them. In this example, Tilly identified 1,500 verbs describing action in the process of parliamentarization in the United Kingdom. These were regrouped into 46 categories and also 8 very generic categories. McAdam et al. (2008) go on to state that

With varying directness, the verbs serve as indicators for mechanisms of contention. In a given paired relationship, for example, an increase in the frequency of attack verbs indicates that 'polarization' is occurring, while an increase in the frequency of support verbs indicates that 'co-ordinated action' is gaining ground. (312)

Yet these are mechanisms that they derived from secondary research, meaning that they are doing little more than trying to fit existing models to examples of contention. There is nothing wrong with this, as such. However, this is exactly the sort of scholarship they are critical of in the *Dynamics* book. As Tilly stated in interview with Mische (Mische and Tilly 2003: 85), for example: 'People would match a set of events to the elements of a conceptual model . . . we say, this isn't supposed to be happening. We're supposed to be explaining these phenomena.' In any case, support verbs can indicate tacit support, which does not always manifest

in coordinated action, as they presume. And the limitations of relying on press coverage to reconstruct protest are not even mentioned (see Rootes 2007: 17).

More fundamentally, McAdam et al. (2001) seem to come close to ‘mechanism talk’ (Norkus 2005), which involves using mechanisms as magic bullets to explain things that do not fit standard theories. Along these lines, Hedström and Ylikoski (2010: 56) had the following appraisal of Tilly’s work:

Despite his inspiring empirical work, his general discussions of mechanism-based explanation (e.g. Tilly 2001) left something to be desired. One gets the strong impression that he used the notion of mechanism as a label to refer to the kind of processes that he for other reasons was interested in.

It is probably fair to apply this appraisal to the McAdam et al. research programme at large. A follow-up book by Tilly and Tarrow (2007) does little to address the problems raised. A number of studies drawing on the *Dynamics* programme have similar or newly created weaknesses. Heany and Rojas (2011) and Karapin (2011), for example, look at (de)mobilization and opportunity threat spirals, respectively, but neither extend their theoretical framework and empirical insights far beyond what we might have learned from political process theories. Biessinger (2011) creates a new weakness. Although developing an account that brings the individual back into focus, it is one that can be critiqued for overplaying agential elements at the expense of the relational. Doubtless it is challenging to balance agency and structure.

Building on the *Dynamics of Contention*

So what can we learn from any of this? First, we can build on what McAdam et al. appear to have got right: the need for a dynamic and relational approach that brings in useful elements from all the strands of prior social movement theorizing. Second, we can seek to avoid their mistakes of ‘mechanism talk’, structural state-centric bias, unintended linearity and conceptual and methodological confusion.

For a number of reasons (see Chapter 1), I prefer not to adopt a mechanistic approach. In much mechanistic work, including McAdam et al.’s (2001) it is stressed that mechanisms are conditions that produce a constant effect within a particular sociopolitical environment. However, such an approach overlooks how organizational strategy and status – which are not themselves mechanisms – might lead to the same mechanism having different effects for different organizations even within the same sociopolitical environment. As we learn from the weak approach to political opportunities (Chapter 5), a polity deemed objectively open, will not ever be open to anti-state actors. Thus, the sociopolitical conditions that are conducive for a mechanism to lead to a given effect for one environmental organization can be expected to differ from those that are conducive for a different one. Drawing

on the notion of systemism (Bunge 1997), a more convincing explanation for an environmental organization's choice of allies can be arrived at by drawing on a host of more dynamic variables. These include the nature of organizations' interactions with each of individuals, the polity (or other campaign targets) and its historical relations with other organizations. Moreover, it is necessary to consider both strategic *and* normative interactions between these different types of actors to derive an explanation for how environmental organizations select their allies. Put differently, I suggest that a synthetic approach which fills *all* of the cells of Table 8.1 is needed. I now illustrate the potential of a synthetic approach to social movement theory with reference to campaigns against climate change and aviation expansion.

A synthetic approach to campaigns against climate change and aviation expansion

As illustrated throughout the text, there is a host possible relationships that pairs or groups of environmental organizations can hold with one another. They might *collaborate*, through working together on a campaign or actions; they could *conflict* with one another, possibly resulting in open hostility;² they may *compete* for resources (whether for financial support or volunteers) without externally visible conflict; or they could *dissociate*, which involves passively ignoring one another in the absence of actual conflict. These four types of relationship give shape to environmental networks at large. Thus, in what follows, I discuss an example of an instance of each type of relationship. Collaboration is discussed in the context of the Baku Ceyhan Campaign. A clash between the Environmental Direct Action Group and WWF over oil pipelines is used to illustrate conflict. The interactions between the Environmental Direct Action Group and the Campaign Against Climate Change are used to illustrate how competition can develop. And non-conflictual dissociation between radicals and locals is discussed in relation to campaigns against a third runway at Heathrow. Here I shall tease out how organizational characteristics, coupled with the manner in which those organizations interact with individuals, the polity (and/or other campaign targets), and their previous relations with other organizations can be said to influence the nature of inter-organizational relationships. Emphasis is given to both strategic and normative forms of action. The account is peppered with theoretical insights gleaned from the contextualization of the theories, as discussed in previous chapters.

Collaboration in the Baku Ceyhan Campaign

The Baku Ceyhan Campaign was a collaborative effort between Cornerhouse, Friends of the Earth, the Ilusi Dam Campaign, Platform and (outside of environmental

networks) the Kurdish Human Rights Project (see Chapter 3). The Environmental Direct Action Group unofficially worked with the coalition. The collaboration was fruitful despite major differences in the strategies deployed by organizational members. Ordinarily, we might expect organizations that engage in direct action to eschew collaboration with lobby groups (Chapter 4). Similarly, those with an established reputation in policymaking circles – like Friends of the Earth – might be expected to dissociate from a radical organization – like the Environmental Direct Action Group (Chapter 5). Organizations that have a similar degree of resources at their disposal, and comparable organizational structures and fields of action are usually the most likely contenders for cooperative relationships. This is especially the case when they are able to work on the basis of a division of labour (Chapter 4). However, in this example the organizations were very different from one another, and yet still collaborated. How then can we explain the collaboration drawing on the synthetic approach?

Looking first at historical relations between organizations, the coalition was built on the back of tried and tested relationships. Most of the organizations involved had previously worked together on the Ilusi Dam Campaign, thus facilitating trust-benefit relations (Chapter 4). Given that they had not worked together prior to the Ilusi Dam Campaign, their historical proclivity for collaboration rather than conflict or competition needs to be explained. Here we can draw on the concept of niches. The very different specialist remits of the partner organizations meant that each was able to contribute – in both the Baku Ceyhan and Illusi Dam Campaigns – to a productive division of labour, while preserving their niches. On the Baku Ceyhan Campaign, Platform brought a wealth of knowledge on oil issues, Cornerhouse had considerable expertise on international financial institutions, and Friends of the Earth, which brought credibility to the campaign, was able to mobilize its local groups. Needless to say, the Kurdish Human Rights Campaign, which has an entirely different ambit, could easily protect its niche among these coalition partners. The Environmental Direct Action Group, as unofficial partner, could also work its usual strategy of direct action. Its lack of a formal role in broader Campaign business meant that the other organizations involved in the Campaign could protect their reputations while the Environmental Direct Action Group itself was still free to engage in its usual radical actions. The Campaign's moderate strategy allowed it not only to avoid repression, but also made it possible for Friends of the Earth as an established organization concerned with resource maintenance, to be a partner. The selection of a wide range of targets – from government departments through to private lenders – also served to protect niche space. The Environmental Direct Action Group focused on shaming BP with audacious direct actions, as well as taking its share of the coordinated weekly street protests.

Moving beyond strategic insights gained from resource mobilization theory, it is also important to note that this particular campaign was not central to the construction of any of the organizations' sense of 'we' (Chapter 7). It did not fundamentally define or shape any of the individual organizations. The weak encompassing identity of the entire coalition allowed it to bear fruit without factions (Flesher Fominaya 2010a). In relation to interactions between individuals and organizations, it was certainly the case that individual identities were not heavily shaped by the Campaign in the way that the Environmental Direct Action Group moulds the identities of its individual participants. This allowed a more tolerant and flexible identity (della Porta 2005) to develop – not a group level collective identity in the sense implied by much of the social movements literature and applied in Chapter 7.

Regarding relationships with the polity, it was clear that all of the organizations involved in the Campaign viewed the political opportunities for influencing the polity to be closed. This was because the Export Credit Guarantee Department had promised to underwrite a substantial portion of the finance for the pipeline (see Chapter 3). All of the organizations involved agreed that there was a need to pull out all the stops to encourage the ECGD to alter its decision and prevent other banks from funding the scheme. Hence, as on the anti-roads protests (Wall 1999a, b) and campaigns against the multiplex entertainment complex at Crystal Palace (Chapter 5, Saunders 2007c), a critical campaign moment facilitated networking across a broad range of organizations. Similarly, none of the organizations directly involved in the campaign had a facilitative or constructive relationship with the large banks (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Finance Corporation and smaller private banks) they were targeting. As with the ECGD, these banks seemed committed to funding the oil pipeline, leaving the way open for a more frontal campaign attack that overtly welcomed the contribution of radicals.

Conflict over oil pipelines

Although relations between the Baku Ceyhan Campaign members and the Environmental Direct Action Group were cordial, even productive, relations between the Environmental Direct Action Group and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) were tense and conflictual. The situation became so dire that the Environmental Direct Action Group even held a protest *against* WWF. The Environmental Direct Action Group was motivated to protest against WWF because WWF was working in close partnership with BP on the Tanguhh gas pipeline project. The protest consisted of a mock wedding between WWF and BP held during a BP-organized conference meeting that sought to mitigate the worst effects of the pipeline (see Table 8.2 for the script). Leaflets were handed out to prospective attendees urging them to

Table 8.2 The wedding of BP to WWF

Minister: Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the presence of the devil to join together BP and WWF; to signify the union between the corrupt and the corruptible; which capitalism dost adorn. Let us be reminded that marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly and after considerable thought. If any person knows any just cause why this couple may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or forever hold his peace. If either of you know why you should not be joined in Holy Matrimony, you should now confess it.

Minister: BP will you take WWF as thy wedded wife, to corrupt her? Will you exploit her, weaken her, ignore her and use her for green wash PR spin? Will you have flings with other NGOs and divorce her when you feel like abusing the environment? Will you love her when your relationship causes her early retirement due to loss of public support?

BP: I will

Minister: WWF, will you take BP to be thy wedded husband, to honour and obey his commands? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and keep him regardless of how he abuses you and breaks environmental laws? Will you forgive him for the loss of public support you will receive as a result of your marriage? Will you love him in floods, droughts, heat waves, hurricanes and typhoons so long as you both shall live?

WWF: I will

Minister: BP repeat after me: 'I BP take thee WWF to be my wedded Wife . . .

'To use and abuse for as long as I feel like it . . .

'So long as the world isn't flooded and I can continue to make money out of oil. . .

'And as long as it is useful for me, we shall be united . . .

'And this is my solemn vow.'

Minister: WWF, repeat after me: 'I WWF take thee BP to be my wedded Husband . . .

'To have and to hold from this day forward . . .

'For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer . . .

'Whatever the weather, till death us do part . . .

'I promise to help BP convince the public that it has the interests of the environment at heart even though this is a blatant lie . . .

'And this is my solemn vow.'

Minister: Capitalism dost preserve and keep you and will look upon you with merciful favour; that ye may allow the oil industry to flourish. You will help suppress information on climate change, pipeline spillages and general environmental destruction and make climate change threats and human rights abuses everlasting. Amen.

boycott the event and stating that ‘collaborations between NGOs and corporations result in the manipulation of those NGOs as pawns, disguising those corporations’ profit-above-all-else mind set and thus giving them unwarranted credibility’. The leaflet incorporated one activist’s rebranding of the WWF logo as a devil (Figure 8.1). While the Environmental Direct Action Group was able to work with Baku Ceyhan Campaign members in relative harmony, why was it not able to work with WWF?

Unlike the Baku Ceyhan Campaign members, WWF and the Environmental Direct Action group had no previous track record of collaboration. The lack of historical collaboration coupled with the encompassing identity of the Environmental Direct Action Group (Chapter 7) makes it somewhat easier for WWF to be placed, by radical activists, under the banner of an archetypal ‘namby-pamby’ NGO that needs to be ‘staked’ (Anon 2004, see Chapter 8). From the Environmental Direct Action

Figure 8.1 Environmental Direct Action Group’s rebranding of the WWF logo

Group's perspective, BP's invitation of stakeholders to their meeting amounted to little more than a BP public relations exercise. In contrast, WWF felt it was making progress building on its previous engagement with BP. Previously, WWF had limited success in improving the company's poor environmental performance. But the lack of any fundamental change in BP's overall approach led to the Environmental Direct Action Group's trenchant critique of WWF's approach. Thus, not only were different strategies deployed, but the overall objectives of their campaigns were different: WWF, with its constructive relationship with BP, was happy to moderate the impact of BP's actions. In contrast, the Environmental Direct Action Group had an antagonistic relationship and wanted the Tanguhh project halted, point blank. Halting the project entirely might require that individuals reduce their overall demand for energy, whereas WWF's approach allows for a society as usual scenario. This identity-based chasm seems impossible to bridge given intense differences between the organizations. It is therefore more likely to lead to conflict than more minor identity-based differences. When coupled with the two organizations' very different relationships with campaign targets, conflict became inevitable.

While this account resembles many other descriptions of conflict between radicals and reformists across many different social movements (see e.g. Downey 1986), it is important to note that reducing the cause of conflict to an ideological clash masks over several strategic and normative processes taking place at multiple levels. In this case, WWF was working strategically to build on what it considered to be historically successful relations with BP at the same time at which the Environmental Direct Action Group was working on a frontal attack of BP as an informal partner in the Baku Ceyhan Campaign. Thus, they had very different relationships with their campaign targets. Coupled with these varying strategic priorities, the organizations did not have any experience of working together in the past, allowing the cultural process of sectarian solidarity to come fully into play (Chapter 7). Thus, individuals with identities bound to the Environmental Direct Action Group were primed for lambasting a more moderate group.

Competition between Campaign Against Climate change and others

In Chapter 4, the awkward relationship between the Campaign Against Climate Change and the Environmental Direct Action Group was deemed to be due to them being in direct competition for supporters at their actions. Despite different strategies, their similarities have made it relatively more difficult for these single-issue groups to carve out a niche for themselves. To make matters more serious, Environmental Direct Action Group members considered that the Campaign Against Climate Change had not returned the favour of offering support to its actions, leaving an unfavourable trust-benefit balance (Chapter 4).

In relation to interactions with the polity, both groups had very different perceptions of the potential of the global climate change regime to halt dangerous climate change. The Campaign Against Climate Change was in favour of strengthening the Kyoto agreement, seeing it a useful stepping stone towards a more robust framework. But the Environmental Direct Action Group considered the whole United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change process to be fundamentally flawed and toothless to bring about positive change. Instead, it preferred grass-roots solutions and directed its campaigns at multifarious targets – not just at the global climate regime. But given differences in campaign strategies, niche overlap is clearly not the key explanandum in this instance of competition.

The Environmental Direct Action Group found it harder to appeal to individuals for support, routinely attracting a dozen or fewer participants to its actions. Its lack of popular support could be said to have sharpened its negative reaction to the lack of reciprocity from the Campaign Against Climate Change. A boost in numbers from Campaign Against Climate Change activists would have increased its capacity enormously. Able to attract hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of supporters to its actions, the Campaign Against Climate Change would not be hit so hard by losing a handful of supporters to the Environmental Direct Action Group.

The Environmental Direct Action Group also encouraged among its participants an encompassing collective identity that resulted in a high degree of intra-group behavioural conformance. This increased the emotional stakes, thus making it more likely to be defensive of its own approach and critical of others' (Chapter 7). Its encompassing identity alone is not enough to set the Environmental Direct Action Group at a distance from all other environmental groups – it worked in collaboration with Friends of the Earth and others on the Baku Ceyhan Campaign. But, in combination with vastly different perceptions of political opportunities, failure to build trust-benefit relations with the Campaign Against Climate Change and its own inability to attract a broader campaign base, competition resulted.

Dissociation of radicals and niche protection in the campaign against the third runway

In the case of the No Third Runway Action Group facilitation and funding of the campaign by the local authority did not result in conflict with radicals, but instead in passive dissociation. The No Third Runway Action Group took advantage of the funding it had received because it was invaluable for enabling it to manage the resources it required to wage its campaign. At the same time, the campaign was careful to protect its reputation with both the local authority and the campaign target – British Airports Authority. Although the campaign was challenging its opponents – its involvement with British Airports Authority could by no means be

demoted to the status of co-option – campaigners were careful not to jeopardize the possibility of having a facilitative relationship with the Airports Authority in the event of the campaign failing. Despite this, No Third Runway Action Group members – as individuals – had offered support to radical activists who had scaled a crane associated with construction of Terminal 5, allowing trust-benefit relations to develop.

Furthermore, organizations within the broader anti-aviation expansion network have been able to work on the basis of a successful division of labour. Local groups are in a unique position to challenge local governance structures. And a number of others fill unique niches, reducing the scope for conflict. Heathrow And Communities Against Noise specializes in noise effects of living under flight paths around Heathrow Airport. The Campaign for the Protection of Rural England brought respectability to the campaign and focused upon the threat to areas of tranquillity and the English countryside. Friends of the Earth used broad-based campaigning and supported its local groups and thereby effectively disseminated information through the network. London Friends of the Earth groups mostly played the role of supporting West London Friends of the Earth that offered a more regional perspective on Heathrow airport and wrote the inquiry submissions and consultation responses on behalf of national Friends of the Earth. The Aviation Environment Federation produced the background research and policy arguments that other organizations were able to draw upon. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was particularly active in the campaign against an airport at Cliffe and is continuing to work on policy arguments. London Wildlife Trust has been involved in mitigating the wildlife impacts of Terminal 5. And Hounslow Against New Terminals, Earth First! and the Environmental Direct Action Group have engaged in more spontaneous direct action to raise the profile of the issue. Airport Watch loosely holds the network of aviation campaigners together. Greenpeace came late to anti-aviation campaigning, but the groundswell of popular discontent meant that it had to contribute in order to protect its reputation and ensure continued support.

All individuals involved in these campaigns shared the key aim of preventing the building of a third runway at Heathrow. As the government had, at the time of field research, given a green light for the proposal providing air quality standards were maintained, all involved perceived the opportunities for influencing policy using conventional means to be closed. If the No Third Runway Action Group was not supported by the local authority, more open collaboration between radicals and reformists, as in the Baku Ceyhan Campaign, would be likely to have developed. A positive trust-benefit balance, coupled with a division of labour and a set of political opportunities perceived as closed usually leads to more open collaboration rather than dissociation.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has pulled out the aspects of social movement theory useful for understanding interaction between environmental groups. Drawing on McAdam et al.'s (2001) *Dynamics of Contention* research programme, it has proposed a synthetic analytical framework for understanding patterns of interaction in environmental networks. This framework emphasizes the importance organizational characteristics in the context of a host of relationships with the polity, campaign targets, individuals and previous relations with other environmental organizations for explaining interaction in environmental networks. It helps begin to overcome some limitations social movement theories. In particular, it addresses their static nature, the structure/agency gap and the chasm between rational and cultural approaches. The approach goes some way to explaining the different configurations of relationships among organizations campaigning against climate change and aviation expansion.

At the very least, this chapter has shown that each of the theories discussed in earlier chapters of this book is required, in an integrated manner, to explain interaction in environmental networks. Thus, rather than viewing social movement theories as competing paradigms, this chapter confirms that it is useful to embrace them eclectically in order to advance understanding of a complex reality. Can this synthetic analytical framework help us understand environmental movements in other countries? And what are the broader questions that it raises for social movement studies? I address these remaining questions in the concluding chapter.