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Sylvia N. Tesh and Eduardo Paes-Machado

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# *Sewers, Garbage, and Environmentalism in Brazil*

SYLVIA N. TESH
EDUARDO PAES-MACHADO

*Public opinion polls indicate that Brazilians think that urban sanitation is a major environmental problem. Many committed environmentalists agree. And indeed, the majority of Brazilians face unreliable or nonextent garbage collection, scare drinking water, open-air sewers, unpaved streets, and water ways and beaches that are polluted with domestic waste. Despite this situation, Brazilian environmental-movement organizations pay scant attention to sanitation. Most of them emphasize instead the preservation of natural resources and the prevention of industrial pollution. To account for this disjunction between public opinion about environmental problems and the agenda of environmental-movement organizations, we offer three explanations. One focuses on the political context in which the movement was born and on that in which it matured, one focuses on the range of resources movement organizations have at their disposal, and one focuses on the fit between urban sanitation and principles of environmentalism.*

***Keywords:*** *Brazil; urban sanitation; environmental movement; environmental problems*

The Brazilian environmental movement is one of the oldest and the strongest in Latin America. It can take credit for a raft of strict environmental laws and for the actual implementation of many of those laws. It can also take credit for a keen environmental consciousness among the Brazilian population at large. Ironically, however, although the movement has prompted people to think in environmentalist terms, the environmental issue that Brazilians consider the most important in their daily lives is barely addressed by movement organizations. That issue, the lack of basic sanitation in urban areas, plays second fiddle in most organizations' agendas, which are concerned primarily with the protection of natural resources.

This situation is puzzling. Why do Brazilian environmental-movement organizations not pay more attention to the environmental problem that concerns the majority of people? Even though social movements are supposed to be leaders, not followers, of public opinion, environmental-movement organizations would seem to have strong incentives to put urban sanitation high on their list of priorities. As com-

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mon sense dictates, and as social-movement scholars show, one ingredient in a movement group's success is emphasizing issues that people care about deeply. This kind of alignment between public concern and an organization's wider agenda helps movement groups to recruit more supporters, raise more money, and attract more volunteers (Snow & Benford, 1992; Snow, Rochford, & Worden, 1986; Szasz, 1994; Tarrow, 1994, pp. 118-134; Zald, 1996). In addition, because the lack of basic sanitation is something people experience in their own neighborhoods, the problem is ripe for local organizing, and local mobilizations are more likely to bring real environmental change than are large, diffuse campaigns (Rucht, 1999). More importantly, a focus on sanitation would seem to be a compelling way to link environmentalism to the problem of poverty, which is, in the eyes of nearly all Latin Americans, the basic social issue (Kaimowitz, 1996).

Besides the organizational advantages, putting sanitation high on their agendas would also add to environmental groups' legitimacy as representational bodies. The process of democratization in Brazil has prompted a strong commitment, even among elites, to greater citizen participation in policy making. This means an important role for environmental organizations, for few citizens in any country can effectively participate as individuals. Instead, they join groups of like-minded people to express their opinions and to negotiate with policy makers (Tesh, 2000, ch. 5). In Brazil, environmental groups are "increasingly recognized as legitimate players" in a policy-making regime where NGOs sit on virtually all important councils at every level of government (Crespo, 2000, p. 4). But the legitimacy of environmental groups may be compromised if their priorities differ markedly from those of most environmentally aware citizens. So why do they not pay more attention to sanitation problems?

In this article, we offer three explanations for the disjunction between public opinion about environmental problems and the agenda of the movement's organizations. One explanation is that the political context into which the movement was born and in which it matured turned activists' attention to broad questions of democratization and to an international environmentalist agenda rather than to the narrower and the more local issues of sanitation in poor neighborhoods. A second explanation is that movement organizations simply lack the resources to handle big, urban pollution campaigns. A third is that urban sanitation does not fit well with the basic principles of environmentalism. Before we elaborate on these explanations, however, we report on several surveys, one of them our own, that indicate the high level of concern Brazilians have for urban sanitation. We provide data to suggest why people might be worried about sanitation (these two topics constitute the first section), and we describe the agenda that most environmental organizations embrace (the topic of the second section).

Throughout, we distinguish between formal organizations and other manifestations of the environmental movement, for like all social movements everywhere, the environmental movement in Brazil exists on several levels. It is a set of ethical principles about what is right and good. It is an amorphous collection of individuals (including journalists, legislators, bureaucrats, industry personnel, teachers, artists, entertainers, and average citizens) who, in their professional and personal lives, behave in ways consistent with those principles. And it is an assortment of formal movement organizations. At issue in this article is the relationship among these aspects of the environmental movement.

## *Public Opinion*

The common assumption in industrialized countries that people in developing areas do not care about environmental quality is simply wrong. Brazilians, for example, worry about the state of the environment about as much as Americans do. As Brechin and Kempton (1994) relate, in a 1992 Gallup poll, 49% of Brazilians and 51% of Americans said that environmental problems in their country are "very serious." Brazilians and Americans also have about the same amount of personal concern about the environment. Of Brazilians, 80% told Gallup pollsters that they had "a great deal" or "a fair amount" of personal concern. Of Americans, 85% said so (Brechin & Kempton, 1994).[1]

Similarly, a 2001 study by the Brazilian Ministry of Environment (Ministério do Meio Ambiente [MMA]) and the Institute of Religious Studies (Instituto de Estudos da Religião [ISER]) showed that Brazilians have a high degree of "adhesion to environmental values." The study polled 2000 people selected to proportionally represent the populations of the four geographical areas of the country and was balanced by sex, age, and social class. Sixty-seven percent of respondents said that nature is sacred and that humans should not interfere with it. Sixty-nine percent disagreed either totally or in part with the statement that they would be willing to live with pollution if it brings more jobs. And 64% disagreed either totally or in part with the statement that the preoccupation with the environment is exaggerated (Crespo & Novaes, 2002, pp. 10-11).[2] This study was part of a series (taking place in 1992, 1997, and 2001) that shows an increase in environmental consciousness over time. In its 1992 incarnation, polling 3,650 people across the country and sponsored by ISER and the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico

1. In Mexico, the number was 83%, and in Uruguay, it was 82%.

2. These data come from a preliminary report, awaiting more complete analysis before publication.

[CNPq]), the study found that 57% of respondents thought that nature should be preserved for its own sake, being above human interests. The same percentage thought that nature is sacred and that humans should not interfere with it. And 62% disagreed either wholly or in part with the statement that they would be willing to live with pollution if it brought more jobs (Crespo & Leitão, 1993, pp. 192, 195, 206).

For our purposes, however, more important than just concern or adhesion to values are the specific environmental problems that Brazilians tell pollsters they worry about. We want to know how these perceived problems compare to the issues that environmental organizations work on, and we want to know if poor people think about the environment the same way that better off people do. Poor people, after all, constitute the majority of the Brazilian population and are most likely to live in environmentally degraded places. Thus, they may be an untapped constituency for an environmental movement that is still heavily middle class.

Not surprisingly, the kinds of environmental problems that people mention in polls depends partly on whether questions are open ended or not and whether the questions are about global, national, or local problems. What do Brazilians consider to be global environmental problems? In the Gallup study, pollsters presented respondents with a list of seven items and asked which of them "may be affecting the earth as a whole." [3] The winner was deforestation, which was listed by 78% of respondents. Loss of ozone and species extinction were close seconds, both listed by 74% of respondents.[4] In the 1992 ISER/CNPq study, pollsters also gave respondents a list to choose from when they asked about global problems.[5] Again, Brazilians chose deforestation most often, although only 58% of them did so. About the same amount of people chose pollution of lakes and of rivers (56%) and air pollution (52%) (Crespo & Leitão, 1993, p. 213). The results were similar in the 2001 ISER/MMA study. With a list of global environmental problems in front of them, 51% chose deforestation; 55% chose pollution of rivers, lakes, and other waters; and 54% chose air pollution (Crespo & Novaes, 2002, p. 7).

Brazilian public opinion looks very different, however, when people are asked about national or about local, as opposed to global, environmental problems. And it looks different when they have no list of possi-

3. The items were air pollution and smog, water pollution, contaminated soil, loss of animal and plant species, loss of rain forest, global warming or greenhouse effect, and loss of ozone in the Earth's atmosphere.

4. Here are the complete numbers: deforestation (78%), species loss (74%), ozone loss (74%), global warming (71%), air pollution (70%), water pollution (69%), and contaminated soil (59%).

5. On the list were deforestation, pollution in rivers and lakes, air pollution, pollution in the ocean, species extinction, the ozone layer, climate change, poor quality of agriculture, the greenhouse effect, and acid rain.

ble answers to prompt their responses. In our study, where people had to decide themselves what constitutes an environmental problem, respondents talked mainly about urban filth and about pollution. (In comparison, the Gallup poll did not ask about national or about local environmental problems, and, as we describe below, although the ISER studies asked about national and about local problems, some of their questions were open-ended, others were not.)

Our survey was done between January 2000 and April 2000 in the city of Salvador, the capitol of the northeastern state of Bahia. Salvador has a population of 2.4 million, one of five cities in Brazil of about that size.[6] The city is located on a broad peninsula between the Baía de Todos os Santos (All Saints Bay) and the Atlantic Ocean. Home to three industrial parks with a total of 107 industries (all of which are outside the city limits), metropolitan Salvador is the largest industrial center in the northeast of Brazil and has the largest petrochemical plant in the southern hemisphere. The area is known throughout the country for its African Brazilian heritage, its gorgeous beaches, its colonial architecture, and its food and music. Despite its somewhat exotic reputation, the city is typical in many ways of the rest of the country. First of all, it is a city, and about 80% of Brazilians now live in urban areas. Second, the number of indigent people is very high (although at 32%, it is higher than the rate of 25% for the country as a whole) and as in the rest of Brazil, poor populations there suffer from high levels of infant mortality, unemployment, substandard housing, violence, child labor, and disease. Third, economic inequality is a major feature of life. Brazil, in fact, has the largest gap between the rich and the poor of any country in the world.[7]

We polled 580 people in Salvador.[8] Of these, 243 lived in middle-class neighborhoods, and 337 lived in poor neighborhoods. About half of the people in each social class were men and about half were women. Ages ranged from teenagers to the elderly.[9] Although this demographic variety was intentional, we did not seek a scientifically representative sample of the population. Because we were interested in the potential for

6. Two others cities are much larger. São Paulo has 16.3 million people and Rio de Janeiro has 9.9 million. The population of Brazil as a whole is 157 million.

7. According to the most recent data (1999) from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, the richest 10% of the Brazilian population has a medium income 19 times greater than that of poorest 40%. No other country in the world comes close to this figure (see Barros, Henriques, & Mendonça, 2000).

8. Interviews were done by Sylvia Tesh and by three students from the Universidade Federal da Bahia over a 12-week period between early January and late March, 2000.

9. Among middle-class respondents, 49.3% were men and 47.7% were women. Three percent of the questionnaires failed to indicate gender. Among poor people, 47.7% were men and 50.7% were women. One-point-six percent of the questionnaires failed to indicate gender.

greater mobilization over environmental issues, we wanted to talk with people who would answer open-ended questions. In other words, we wanted people who had at least some opinion about the environment. We specifically wanted to avoid the experience of the ISER pollsters. Their three surveys (in 1992, 1997, and 2001) used carefully chosen representative samples of the Brazilian population, but when respondents were asked to give their own opinions about what environmental problems were most important—that is, when there was no list to chose from—about half of the respondents were unable to identify a single problem. So we used a convenience sample. We talked with middle-class people either at shopping malls or at middle-class beaches. We talked with poor people, mainly in their neighborhoods. In both cases, we struck up conversations with anyone who seemed willing to talk with us. (In general, it was easier to interview poor people, who tended to cluster around us, than middle-class people, who tended to steer away.)[10] With this methodology, nearly everyone we interviewed had something to say. By sacrificing some of the scientific rigor that the ISER pollsters aimed for, we believe we were more likely to talk with the kind of person who might become engaged in environmental activism. (We discuss below the idea that public opinion polls can be scientifically rigorous.)

Our survey had four questions. All were open ended, because we wanted to know what our respondents considered to be environmental problems, not whether they agreed with our notions of environmental problems. We first asked, "In your opinion, what are the biggest environmental problems in Brazil?" Then we asked, "In your opinion, what are the biggest environmental problems in Salvador?" Then, "In your opinion what are the biggest environmental problems where you live?" Our fourth question (which we will discuss in a future article) was, "What do you think can be done about these problems?"

We received thousands of answers. To code them, we first distinguished between age-old pollution problems that were widely identified in Brazil long before the birth of the environmental movement and the new pollution problems that environmentalists began calling attention to as the movement matured. We labeled the age-old problems *unsanitary conditions* and included in the category responses such as water pollution, open sewers, lack of pavement, uncollected garbage, and basic sanitation. We labeled the new problems *uncontrolled industrialization*, a category that includes responses such as pollution from cars, overuse of agro-toxins, radioactive or industrial waste, global warming, acid rain, and sound pollution. In a third category, *destruction of natural resources*, we put responses such as degradation of ecosystems, endan-

10. We carried around clipboards but had no distinguishing badges or T-shirts.

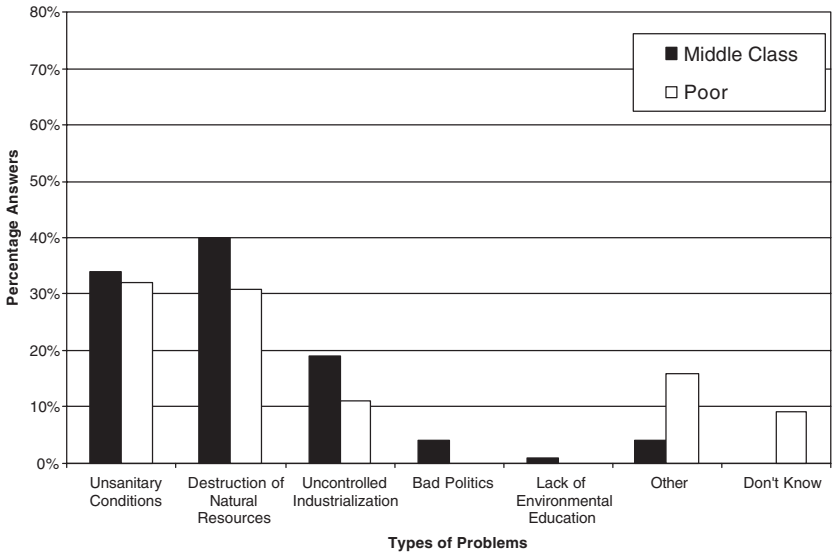


**Figure 1: Environmental problems in Brazil.**

gered species, destruction of water reserves, and deforestation.[11] Other responses we coded as "bad politics" (e.g., incompetent government, ambitious politicians, underfunded environmental agencies), "lack of environmental education" (sometimes described as lack of *concientização*), "do not know or none," and of course, "other."[12]

## SALVADOR SURVEY RESULTS

One of our major findings is that most people thought the destruction of natural resources was an environmental problem only when they were considering Brazil as a whole. When they reflected on environmental problems close to home, natural-resource issues like deforestation, species extinction, and the degradation of ecosystems did not come to many people's minds. Even when Brazil as a whole was the issue, only 40% of the answers by middle-class people and 31% of the answers by poor people were about some aspect of the destruction of natural resources (see Figure 1.) Within that category, by far the most frequently mentioned kind of destruction was deforestation (*desmatamento*). For the

11. To guard against biasing our results in favor of voluble respondents, we counted as only one answer when people listed several aspects of, for example, unsanitary conditions.

12. The "other" category includes a great variety of responses such as "misery," "lack of transportation," "heat," and "drugs." But most of the answers in this category are "violence," "unemployment," and "poverty."

middle class, deforestation was 50% of all the natural-resource answers, and for poor people, it was 22%. Deforestation, however, seems to be more a general concept than anything very precise. Few people talked about specific forests. Only 13 people out of the 580 we interviewed mentioned the Amazon Forest. And only 10 mentioned the Atlantic Forest. Moreover, hardly anyone used synonyms for deforestation. They did not say "cutting down trees," "loss of forests," or "forests are not protected." They had one flat term: *desmatamento*. The lack of specificity and of equivalents is especially striking because Salvadorans are living in the remains of the magnificent Atlantic Forest—a forest once covering 12% of the country that has been almost completely destroyed and that continues to disappear (Costa & Correa, 1992; Dean, 1995).

Another other major finding from our survey is that, overall, people thought that lack of urban sanitation was the most important environmental problem. When we asked about environmental problems in Brazil as a whole, middle-class people did mention sanitation issues like open-air sewers, polluted beaches, and uncollected garbage less often than they mentioned aspects of the destruction of natural resources (34% and 40% of responses, respectively). But poor people mentioned sanitation issues somewhat more often than they mentioned natural resources (see Figure 1). And when we asked about environmental problems in the city of Salvador and in their own neighborhoods, respondents in both social classes talked about aspects of urban sanitation more often than anything else (see Figures 2 and 3). In addition, many people, especially poor people, were clearly referring to sanitation problems that they knew from personal experience. When we were interviewing in poor neighborhoods, our respondents pointed to piles of uncollected garbage; they waved toward the ocean when they described filth on the beach; they took us by the arm to show us gray sewage seeping up through cracks in the pavement or running along an open drain; they showed us where rats appeared at dusk. One woman burst into tears.

A third finding is that our respondents were relatively unworried about the environmental problems accompanying uncontrolled industrialization—a category including answers about exposure to synthetic chemicals and heavy metals, pesticide-contaminated food, anthropogenic climate change, radioactive pollution, air pollution, sound pollution, overcrowding, and poor city planning. To poor people, these kinds of things did not even rank third among environmental problems. Most of them were more worried about the problems we coded as "other"—mainly violence and poverty and unemployment. This relative lack of concern about uncontrolled industrialization among poor people existed whether we asked about environmental problems in Brazil as a whole, in the city of Salvador, or in their own neighborhoods.

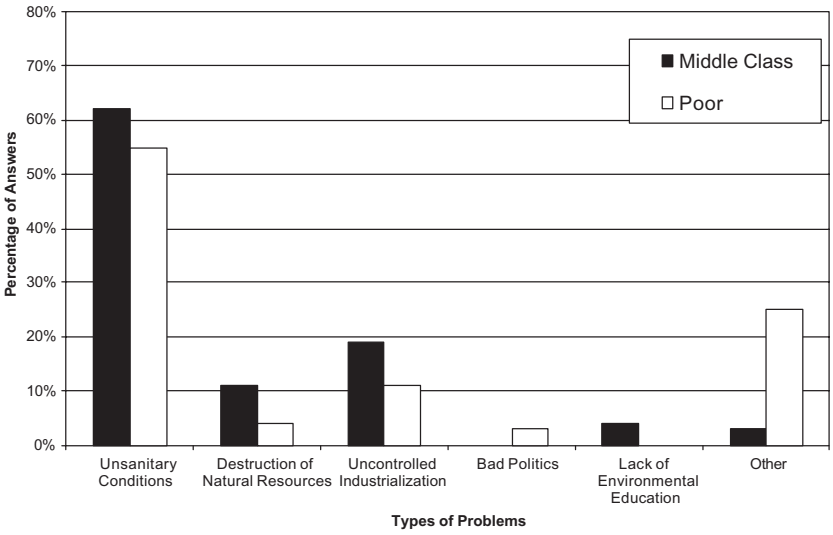


**Figure 2: Environmental problems in Salvador.**

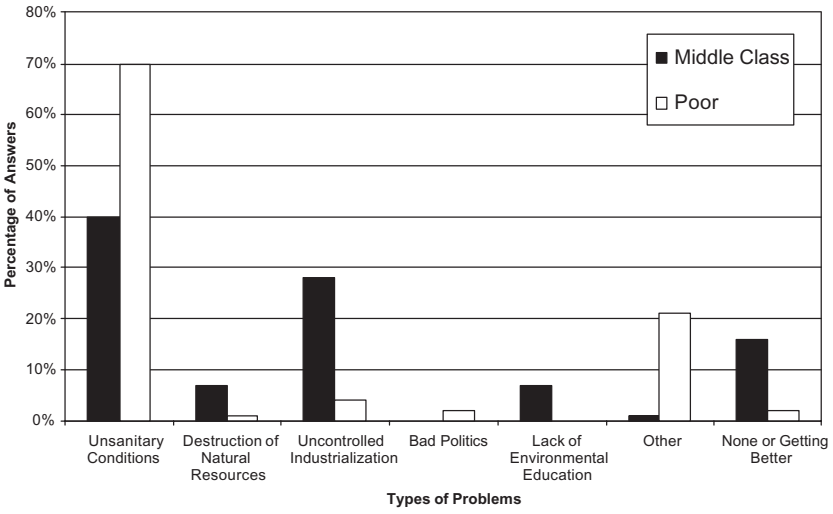


**Figure 3: Environmental problems where people live.**

To middle-class people, uncontrolled industrialization ranked third among environmental problems—after the destruction of natural resources and unsanitary conditions—when the issue was environmental problems in Brazil as a whole. It ranked second after unsanitary con-

ditions when the issue was environmental problems in the city of Salvador and in their own neighborhoods. But it was a very far second among city environmental problems, accounting for fewer than 20% of answers, compared to more than 60% of answers about sanitation. It was a closer second among neighborhood environmental problems—28% of answers versus 40% of answers. It is interesting to note that the aspect of uncontrolled industrialization that middle-class people mentioned the most was not industrial waste or climate change or pesticide use but noise pollution—the racket from cars, diesel buses, and trucks and the din from bars and from restaurants.

All these data suggest strong support in Salvador for environmental campaigns on urban sanitation. Both middle-class and poor people consider it a serious problem whether they are thinking about environmental issues in the country as a whole, in the city, or in their neighborhoods. More than that, sanitation is something people know about from their own experience. In contrast, although Salvadorans feel that the degradation of natural resources is an issue, to most of them it is a far-off problem and one that they think of in fairly abstract terms. As for uncontrolled industrialization, few Salvadorans seem to worry about it, despite the concentration of industry in the metropolitan area. For those who do, the worst aspect of uncontrolled industrialization, noise pollution, is an immediately apparent, neighborhood-level experience.

## OTHER SURVEYS

Public opinion surveys in other parts of Brazil support our findings. Not one, however, is comparable to ours in being both completely open ended and asking respondents about environmental problems nationally as well as locally. The most similar is a study about neighborhood-level problems in São Paulo, Brazil, conducted by the Stockholm Environmental Institute in 1991 and 1992. São Paulo is the largest and most industrialized city in Brazil. The metropolitan region has a population of more than 15 million people and has half of Brazil's industrial jobs. Spread out over a featureless landscape, São Paulo is infamous for its urban sprawl and for its congested traffic.

As one writer says,

> It is a difficult city to live and work in, even for the professional with a car, phone and maid. For a worker who lives in a suburban shantytown and has to commute to work four hours a day on crowded busses, it is a purgatory. . . . With a million workers unemployed, São Paulo is a hard place to look for a job. (Winn, 1995, p. 225)

At the same time, São Paulo is a magnet for creative and enterprising Brazilians. It is the most cosmopolitan city in the country, home to the

leading newspapers, excellent universities, and 30 of Brazil's 50 largest companies.

The Stockholm Environmental Institute survey covered 1000 households, chosen to represent three social classes—rich, middle, and poor. All respondents were asked, as an open-ended question, to list the major environmental problems in their neighborhoods. The answers show that the better off people in São Paulo are highly concerned about air pollution. Both wealthy and middle-class people spoke of air pollution most frequently (82% of households and 73% of households, respectively). But although wealthy people also talked a lot about noise pollution (their next most commonly cited problem, at 58% of households), for the middle class, second place went to sanitation problems. Half of middle-class households (49%) mentioned contaminated streams and nearby rivers, whereas one quarter (24%) mentioned water supply and quality. In poor neighborhoods, sanitation problems were number one. Three quarters of households in poor neighborhoods (74%) mentioned water supply and quality. Somewhat more than half (58%) mentioned contaminated streams and nearby rivers, and half (49%) mentioned sewage (see Jacobi, 1994; Jacobi, Kjellén, & Castro, 1998, p. 13).

If we translate this information to the categories we used in the Salvador survey, for wealthy Paulistas, the major neighborhood environmental problem was uncontrolled industrialization (with air pollution being the worst). For middle-class people, the problems were both uncontrolled industrialization and unsanitary conditions, and for poor people, the big environmental problem was unsanitary conditions. In other words, even though São Paulo is more wealthy and more developed than Salvador, all but the richest people consider sanitation to be a serious neighborhood problem.

The only other public opinion polls that have asked Brazilians to come up with their own list of environmental problems are the ISER surveys we mentioned earlier. The surveys are extensive. Each one polled at least 2000 randomly chosen Brazilians representing populations from the five main regions of the country. Although most of the questions in these surveys are tightly structured, some are open-ended.

It is interesting to note that these open-ended polls seem, at first, to contradict ours. In the 1992 ISER/CNPq survey, there was a question about environmental problems in Brazil as a whole. Although most respondents (47%) said that they did not know or had no opinion, those who did have opinions about national environmental problems talked mostly about the destruction of natural resources. Only 6% said anything about sanitation (Crespo & Leitão, 1993, p. 213). This is a much lower figure than we found. However, their results may be an artifact of the order of questioning. ISER pollsters asked about environmental problems in the country as a whole only after a long series of other questions that had defined environmental issues almost exclusively in terms

of natural resources. How would people have responded in a different context? We do not know, but they might well have talked more about sanitation had they been cued to think that it was a legitimate answer.

The results of the 2001 ISER/MMA survey were also not much like ours. Here, the open-ended question was about environmental problems in people's own neighborhoods. More than half of respondents (56%) either said that they could not think of any problems or that they had no opinion.[13] Twenty-three percent, though, said that the main problem was either lack of sanitation or pollution of lakes, rivers, and beaches (Crespo & Novaes, 2002, p. 6). This is still considerably different from our survey (where 40% of middle-class people's answers and 70% of poor people's were about sanitation).[14] But like the 1992 ISER survey, this 2001 one may have cued people about the correct answer. Unfortunately, we cannot know, because the preliminary report that has been released so far does not show what the order of questions was. What is clear, however, is that the findings in both ISER surveys were diluted by the huge number of respondents who had no opinion, whereas nearly everyone we talked with had something to say. Thus, our methodology increased the percentage of answers in each category.

It is important to note that these coding and commensurability issues are not the only problems with interpreting public opinion surveys. We are fully aware that the surveys themselves can never objectively measure public opinion. As we suggest above, and as critics have shown for a long time, respondents' answers vary according to such things as the order in which questions are asked, the kinds of words used, the location of the interview, and the gender of the questioner (Wheeler, 1976). More importantly, the whole concept of public opinion surveys is based on the ideological presumptions inherent in individualism (Salmon & Glasser, 1995). So all the numerical information we report here should be construed as a general picture of what Brazilians think about the environment rather than as precise data. The graphs are heuristic devises; the numbers represent strong impressions. But the general picture, even with these caveats, seems to show a population that thinks the lack of sanitation is a major environmental problem.

One other survey is relevant to our conclusion. It is a 1992 multidisciplinary study of environmental opinion leaders, done by Samyra Crespo and her colleagues, as part of the ISER/CNPq project. The survey consisted of 72 long interviews with people "directly or indirectly

13. These are the percentages for all social classes combined; the researchers note that the higher the class, the more likely people were to have opinions, but they do not give exact figures (Crespo & Novaes, 2002, p. 8).

14. It is important to note a major difference between our figures and those from the ISER studies. We allowed our respondents to give a number of answers to each question, so we counted the number of answers we received. ISER pollsters allowed only one answer per question, so they counted the number of people who gave each answer.

involved in environmental questions: environmentalists, government technicians, scientists, representatives of social movements (the black movement, the women's movement, unions, etc.) business people, and politicians" (Crespo & Leitão, 1993, pp. 5-6). Despite their apparent heterogeneity, all interviewees were environmentalists, although they were not necessarily activists in an environmental organization. "[T]he selection criterion was a manifest interest and knowledge about the environmental problem [thus, among the interviewees] there were no radical opponents to the theses and ideas disseminated by environmentalism, but only different degrees of familiarity and adhesion" (Crespo & Leitão, 1993, p. 40). Among other questions, the interviewers asked these environmentalists what they thought were the most serious environmental problems in Brazil. The answer was "urban issues." As the study's authors say,

> The big emphasis was given to the urban problem, independently of the sector studied. As a whole, the sample expressed a clear consciousness that, besides the more general environmental problems (loss of biodiversity, soil fertility, contamination of water resources, etc.) the specific Brazilian environmental problems are [in the cities]. (Crespo & Leitã, 1993, p. 125)

Interviewees talked mainly about four urban problems in this order of frequency: lack of sanitation, accentuated industrialization, industrial pollution, and water pollution. Interviewees said things such as the following: "The environmental problem is not in the industries, it's not automobiles. . . . Most of the population is concentrated in the cities, which have no infrastructure, they're bloated, they have no basic sanitation at all. So the urban problem takes priority"; "The most serious [environmental] problem is misery, or rather the lack of basic sanitation"; and we must "concentrate forces to confront the urban problem" (Crespo & Leitão, 1993, pp. 125-126).

So it appears that even environmental leaders, who presumably know better than most people the full range of environmental problems in Brazil, believe that the deplorable conditions in the cities should take priority. They are more worried than are our respondents about industrial pollution and uncontrolled (or accentuated) industrialization in general, but they think that urban problems are more pressing than the degradation of natural resources.

## SANITARY CONDITIONS

It is not hard to see why Brazilians worry about sanitation. In Salvador, for example, 72% of the city's population is currently excluded from the sewer system, although a major public-works project to change that

situation is underway. Most of the excluded, of course, are the poor, of which 86% live in houses unconnected to sewers. But even middle- and upper-class people lack sewerage; 45% live in houses unconnected to the network. What happens to the waste from these houses? In wealthier neighborhoods, most of it goes into septic tanks. In poorer areas, some is discharged directly on the ground behind houses or in nearby pools, and some is sent into storm drains and into open gullies where it meets up with streams and makes its odorous way through the city to the sea (Forum Controle Social de Bahia Azul, 1997, p. 10; Moraes, 1997; Paes-Machado & Cardoso, 1997). One of the largest of these open-air sewers runs along a broad concrete culvert smack through a middle-class neighborhood. It is funneled onto a picturesque beach, contaminating the seawater and decorating the sand with the decomposing and the undecomposable flotsam and jetsam of urban life. Indeed, most of the city's beaches are the end designation for huge concrete storm drains, any one of which is likely to carry raw sewage whenever it rains.

As for household garbage in Salvador, the majority is collected daily by the city. But at least 30%, or 700 tons a day, is not. This trash piles up in vacant lots and is tossed down hillsides and into canals and rivers. The accumulated garbage exacerbates the storm-drain problem, helping to cause city-wide floods whenever the rains are heavy (Moraes, 1997). Unpaved streets are another feature of urban life. Although reliable data are nonexistent, it is probably safe to say that a majority of streets in Salvador's poor neighborhoods lack pavement. Those with pavement are usually in disrepair, are rife with potholes, are dirty or muddy depending on the season, and seldom have sidewalks. These filthy streets, along with the uncollected garbage and the network of open sewers, take a high toll on public health (Barreto et al., 1997).

None of this information about filth and about pollution in the city of Salvador is hidden from residents. Poor people, of course, live with it every day. And poor neighborhoods are scattered throughout the city, so middle-class people not only pass them as they drive to and from work or go out for the evening and on weekends, but many can view them from their apartment windows. In addition, every one knows that most of the beaches are frequently contaminated with raw sewage. They can see the big concrete drainage pipes. They can also read the daily column in *A Tarde*, the largest circulation newspaper in the city, which reports on which beaches have so-called acceptable fecal coliform levels and on which have so-called nonacceptable levels. *A Tarde* ("Cobertura do saneamentoé," 2001), in fact, is a constant source of information about sanitation in Salvador. For several years, the editors have been on a clean-up crusade. Several times every week they run a quarter-page photo, often on the front page, of an open-air sewer someplace, a pile of garbage on a beach, or of a street full of potholes.

In São Paulo, where most middle- and upper-class neighborhoods have good sanitation services, 68% of houses in poor neighborhoods lack a connection to the sewage system, and 65% are on unpaved streets. Indeed, for São Paulo as a whole, nearly 27% of households are not on the public sewerage network, and 265 lack pavement. Of all households, regardless of social class, 82% experience interruptions in the water supply every day, and 36% have inadequate garbage services. Half of all sewage is released untreated, along with industrial wastes, into the River Tieté (Jacobi et al., 1998; McGranahan, Jacobi, Songsore, Surjadi, & Kjellen, 2001, ch. 4).

The sanitation story in the rest of Brazil is similar. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, nearly half of all houses in the country (47.7%) are not connected to a water supply and lack sewer pipes and garbage collection. Being connected to sewer pipes, however, rarely means that a house's waste goes to a treatment plant. In Brazil today, nearly 90% of domestic sewage is released into the environment without any kind of treatment whatsoever. And 63% of household garbage is dumped into rivers, lakes, or other bodies of water (Nacimento, 2001).

Given that environmental activists and the general public alike consider urban pollution to be a critical environmental problem in Brazil, and given that the lack of basic sanitation is indeed common throughout the country, one might expect that for many if not for most environmental-movement organizations, sanitation is one of the main projects—that the issue is covered regularly in movement journals, pamphlets, and newsletters and that movement groups work hard to put unsanitary urban conditions high on the global environmental agenda. One might expect, in other words, that Brazilian environmental organizations have made sanitation their central priority. But this is not the case. Instead of being central, the issue hovers on the periphery.

## *Environmental Movement Agenda*

The environmental movement spawned its first organizations in Brazil in the early 1970s, and their number grew rapidly. By 1992, at the time of the United Nations Environmental Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil had somewhere between 800 and 1,300 environmental groups.[15] Today, although the number is somewhat smaller and although they have fairly low public visibility, most groups are still vigorous and, as we noted in the introduction, governments recognize them as legitimate

15. The smaller number comes from Crespo and Leitão, 1993, p. 140; the larger number from Viola, 1997, p. 100.

players in policy making. The bulk of groups are in the south and in the southeast, but every state has some. They exist on all political levels—national, state, and local—and are extremely diverse. Although by all accounts they are largely middle-class, environmental organizations that run the gamut of political positions from center to far left. Some are primarily professional organizations, others depend mainly on volunteers. A central project for nearly everyone has always been environmental education—spreading environmentalist principles and exhorting people to take action in accordance with them. Most groups also do policy work. To that end, they employ a wide variety of political tactics, from sitting on councils, lobbying policymakers, and collecting signatures to staging mass protests and engaging in civil disobedience, and they take on every conceivable environmental issue (Crespo & Leitão, 1993; Fonseca & de Souza Pinto, 1996; Hochstetler, 1997; Svirsky, 1998; Viola, 1992, 1997).

The range of environmental issues is evident in a report prepared for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro by a huge coalition of Brazilian environmental organizations (Forum de ONGs Brasileiras, 1992). The report first describes 16 major causes of the country's "socio-environmental crisis" and then calls for the following actions, listed here in order:

- the construction of a model of development committed above all to the preservation of life on the planet;
- decentralized energy production, using alternative sources of energy;
- a radical revision of the Brazilian nuclear program;
- sustainable exploration of Brazilian mineral reserves;
- a national policy for the utilization of fresh-water ecosystems that takes into consideration biodiversity and environmental and social costs;
- the preservation of the existing biodiversity in our country;
- specific treatment for each of the great Brazilian ecosystems;
- agrarian reform and an agriculture policy that permit the restoration and the development of small family farms;
- a new fishing policy;
- a redefinition of the Brazilian industrial model, with the goals of protecting the environment, generating jobs, distributing revenue, and strengthening the internal market;
- profound urban reform based on three principles: the social function of property, citizens rights, and the democratic management of the city;
- a policy of health and of sanitation that guarantees adequate infrastructure conditions for human settlements in the country and in the city;
- guaranteed access to family planning information;
- solid investment in education, science, and technology;
- the promotion of environmental education;

- the democratization of the means of communication;
- a permanent fight against racism;
- a definitive demarcation of indigenous territories;
- the effective implantation of extractive reserves;
- access by NGOs and by social movements to studies, research, and other information of public interest produced by government; and
- the participation by NGOs and by social movements in all decisions relating to the environment and development. (pp. 18-21)

To us, the most noteworthy thing about this list, besides its wide sweep, is that the issue of urban sanitation sits so far from the top. It is number 12, nearly at the bottom, really, for most of the issues following it are either wholly or partly owned by one of the nonenvironmental groups (i.e, the women's, indigenous, black, and labor movements) that were part of the Forum (Forum de ONGs Brasileiras, 1992, pp. 16-18).

We do not mean to imply that environmental groups in the early 1990s ignored the problem of urban pollution. Sanitation, after all, is on the list, and some environmental groups at that time were supporting struggles in poor communities for clean water and for sewage disposal systems (Viola, 1997). Our point is that, as critics pointed out at the time, environmentalists in the early 1990s were far more concerned with biodiversity, the devastation of natural resources, and industrial pollution than they were with domestic garbage, sewerage, and water treatment (Pacheco, Loureiro, M. R., Fingermann, H., Amaral, H. K. D., & MacDowell, S., 1992; Torres, 1992).

The environmentalist agenda has not changed much since 1992. In 1997, the forum (now diminished from 1200 organizations to 300) published another report on environmental issues in Brazil. Again, urban pollution is low on the list. It follows agriculture, fishing, mineral extraction, industry, energy, transport, waters, forests, biodiversity, and desertification. And the environmental organizations were so focused on these kinds of issues that not one representative from an environmentalist group joined the subgroup of 17 people that wrote the urban issues section (Leroy, Maia, & Guimarães, 1997, pp. 281-301).

In 2001, the forum began preparing for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. To create proposals, it formed eight working groups consistent with, as the forum's Web page puts it, "the principle aspects of the Brazilian environment" (ongsbrasil.org). The eight working groups are on energy, climate, water, biodiversity, forests, international commerce, agriculture, and Agenda 21. Sanitation does make an appearance in two of these working groups' reports—the Agenda 21 group and the water group. But the Agenda 21 group puts sanitation dead last in a list of 12 recommended actions, and although the water group does make one sanitation issue,

access to water, its number one proposal, the proposal did not come from the Brazilian working group alone. Instead, it is part of a water document written by a collection of conferees representing 118 countries, mainly African, that met in Bonn in August 2001 (www.ongsbrasil.org).

How about small environmental organizations that may not have participated in the forum?. According to a 1995 study of the agendas of 725 grassroots environmental organizations, these too concentrate on the protection of natural resources. The study (which was called ECOLISTA and surveyed 260 government environmental organizations as well as the grassroots groups) found that "most [of the 725 grassroots] organizations specialize in a bioregion, focusing their activities on particular ecosystems"[16] (Crespo, 2000, p. 5). Such an organizing principle almost inevitably defines urban sanitation as a side issue, although many of the groups did have sanitation on their agendas.[17]

This relative inattention to sanitation is also reflected in the Brazilian environmental movement's publications. For example, during 1998 and 1999, three of the largest movement magazines ran stories on all of the first 10 proposals on the 1992 Earth Summit report. (The three magazines put out a total of 15 issues during those 2 years, with 8 to 10 stories per issue.)[18]. They also ran stories on topics that do not fit easily into any of the 1992 categories, including biotechnology, sound pollution, endangered species, recycling, and ecotourism. But not one of these magazines published articles on urban sanitation.

We want to stress again that we do not mean that today's environmental organizations, any more than those of a decade ago, totally ignore sanitation issues. As we said above, the groups are extremely diverse. A number of environmental groups do have urban pollution on their agendas, including, in a recent initiative, the Sao Paulo chapter of the largest Brazilian environmental organization, SOS Mata Atlántica. But the absence of stories about sewerage, garbage, unpaved streets, and water treatment in these magazines, which have so many articles on so many other issues, is a good illustration of the fact that, as a whole, Brazilian environmental organizations simply have not put urban pollution high on their lists of priorities.

Why do movement groups pay so little attention to urban sanitation? Why, if the general public and the environmental opinion leaders alike think that this kind of pollution is the major environmental problem, do

16. Fifty-three percent concentrate on the Atlantic forest, 21% concentrate on the bush, 16% on the Amazon, 8% on coastal areas, and 7% on wetlands.

17. The survey shows that 58.8% of groups have solid and liquid waste on their agenda and that 35.4% have sanitation on their agenda, but it is impossible to interpret this information because the published data do not indicate whether these are governmental or nongovernmental groups.

18. The magazines were *Ambiente Hoje, Jornal do Meio Ambiente* and *Folha do Meio Ambiente*.

organizations not focus on it? To address the question, we turn now to three possible explanations for the groups' agendas: the political context in which the movement arose and matured, a scarcity of organizational resources, and the poor fit between urban sanitation and environmentalism. These explanations are not mutually exclusive. Nor do we argue that any one of them is the real explanation. Instead, these are overlapping conjectures, drawn from social movement theory, with aspects of each one affecting the other two. Together, they present an overview of the conditions constraining Brazilian environmental organizations' agendas.

## *Brazilian Environmental Movement*

### POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Brazilian environmental movement was born during the military dictatorship and came of age in an era when the premier social issue was forging a return to democracy. The first movement groups to organize formed their major alliances and solidified their goals in the context of the 1992 Earth Summit. As a result, the organizations spent more of their energies on institution building than on agenda creation and tended to adopt wholesale the agenda of the international environmental movement. In other words, what social-movement scholars call the political-opportunity structure has had a profound effect on the Brazilian environmental movement. The political-opportunity structure has been most authoritatively defined by Sidney Tarrow (1996) as "dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (p. 85; see also McAdam, 1996). In the case of Brazilian environmentalists, however, although the political environment provided plenty of incentives to undertake collective action, it also directed activists away from the issue of urban sanitation.

Although at least two conservation-type organizations existed in Brazil as early as 1958,[19] by all accounts, the first environmental-movement organization was AGAPAN (Associacão Gaúcho de Proteção ao Ambiente Natural), established in 1971, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. This was about the time that similar groups first formed in the United States, and AGAPAN was "clearly influenced by the new North American environmental movement" (Viola, 1992, p. 265; see also Hochstetler, 1997; Saraiva, 1991; Viola, 1988). That the organization even saw the

19. Association of Defenders of the Flora and Fauna was established in 1956 (see Crespo & Leitão, 1993, pp. 11-12). The Brazilian Foundation for the Conservation of Nature was established in 1958 (see Viola, 1992).

light of day is remarkable, for in the early 1970s, Brazil was deep into a 20-year-long brutal military dictatorship. At the time AGAPAN formed, the military, which took power in 1964, was still prohibiting all oppositional political activity. Anyone publicly criticizing the regime risked imprisonment, forced exile, torture, and death (Catholic Church, Archdiocese of São Paulo, 1985/1986). In 1974, when military rule began to ease up, a few more environmental groups organized, these too following the North American model. Yet although they all had long lists of environmental issues to address and a big task of raising environmental consciousness among the public, most of their energies—like those of all other Brazilian social-movement organizations at the time—were spent on the struggle to oust the dictatorship. In Katherine Hochstetler's (1997) words, environmental activists "often put their unique agenda second to the broader agenda of regime transformation" (p. 205). So as it was first taking shape, the Brazilian environmental movement concentrated on the issue of democratization, seeing that as a first step toward environmental protection. Its initial, intensely political years did not leave much time for soul searching about the extent to which the North American environmental agenda fit Brazil's situation.

With the gradual return to democracy in the mid–1980s, there was finally political space for environmental organizations to turn all their attention to environmental issues. Certainly they had reason to. The military's obsession with economic growth had had brutal ecological consequences. Government officials, for example, had wooed foreign industries with the promise of weak environmental regulations; urban poverty, with its concomitant pollution, was increasing; and development policies in the Amazon region had already resulted in massive deforestation. But because movement organizations had spent their early years mainly on opposing the dictatorship, they had no clear environmentalist agenda and little resonance with the population at large (Viola, 1997). The exception was a strong and widely popular campaign from 1980 to 1984 against industrial pollution in the city of Cubatão, a campaign that, for a time, became emblematic of environmental problems in Brazil (Lemos, 1998; Hogan, 1993). Throughout 1984, activists from environmental organizations held regional meetings to identify priorities, discuss relations with political parties, and form alliances with other social movements (Viola, 1988). The main upshot was a decision to throw themselves into the forthcoming Constituent Assembly, a body charged with writing a new Constitution. Thus, between 1986 and 1988, a huge so-called Green Block worked together successfully to get strong environmentalist language included in the constitution (Crespo & Leitão, 1993; Hochstetler, 1997; Viola, 1988, 1997).

With the new constitution finally in place, environmental groups were freed up to take concrete steps in a campaign for environmental protection and for pollution prevention. But they were almost immedi-

ately faced with another organizational project. This time, it was planning for the Global Forum, a parallel people's conference accompanying the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro.[20] The planning began 2 years beforehand, in 1990, and included eight national preparatory meetings. It mobilized even more environmental organizations than had come together over the constitution, as well as individual environmentalists not associated with formal environmental groups. In fact, virtually the entire environmental movement in Brazil devoted its energies for 2 whole years to the conference (Crespo & Leitão, 1993; Hochstetler, 1997; Viola, 1997).

As a result of all this, Brazilian environmentalists became major players in the global environmental movement, at least during the early 1990s (McCoy & McCully, 1993). At the same time, however, they embraced the ideas and the issues dominating the global movement. In Rio de Janeiro, activists from all countries necessarily grappled with the theme of the conference: sustainable development. And even though many Brazilian environmentalists joined the world-wide critique of the concept both during the conference and after by subsequently charging that it was conceptually weak and politically conservative (Crespo & Leitão, 1993; Diegues, 1992; McCoy & McCully, 1993; Viola, 1997), so-called sustainable development still has a firm grip on the environmentalist agenda. In other words, the central focus of organized environmentalism in Brazil is on finding a balance between protecting natural resources and increasing industrialization.

There is no way to know for sure what Brazilian environmental groups would look like today had activists not spent so much time on state building or been so deeply involved in the Rio de Janeiro conference. But a major emphasis on urban sanitation seems unlikely. Environmentalism, after all, is international. Environmentalists throughout the world all read the same writers (Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, Rene Dubos, Paul Erhlich, Bill McKibbon); learn the same key phrases (*endangered species*, *ecosystems*, *the greenhouse effect*, *climate change*, *sustainable development*); and attend the same international conferences. Although this shared activity makes for a strong movement internationally, at the same time, it stakes out the perimeters of movement activism to fit the concerns of the most powerful countries. Environmentalists from the United States and from Europe define what counts as an environmental problem and what is some other kind of problem. They are the ones who signal those environmental problems that are the most critical. And they

20. The Brazilian government had been eager for the conference to be held in Brazil because international publicity about the destruction of the Amazon had saddled the country with the reputation of being the environmental villain of the world.

are the ones for whom open-air sewers and uncollected garbage are simply not social (or environmental) problems.

### SCARCE RESOURCES

A second possible explanation for Brazilian environmental organizations giving short shrift to urban pollution is a scarcity of resources. Social-movement theorists have long argued that an organization's success requires more than passion about an issue. It also requires resources like money, time, information, a dedicated staff, strong allies, expertise in running meetings, experience in press relations, and information about how the government operates (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978). Many Brazilian environmental groups face a shortage of these things. For most organizations, mounting a big sanitation campaign—when their political histories and their connection to the international environmental movement heavily commit them to other issues—would simply take more money, staff, expertise, and supporters than they have.

Money is fundamental. It comes from a variety of sources: government, industry, international NGOs, and individual contributions or memberships. But it does not add up to a lot—less than U.S. $10,000 per year for the vast majority of groups (Crespo, 2000)—and is not easily increased to add new sanitation campaigns. Groups cannot expect a great deal more than they already receive from individual contributions because Brazilians do not get tax breaks for donating to nonprofit organizations. Government, industry, and international NGOs might be a source of more money, but grants from these institutions are really only available to large environmental groups, and many eschew this kind of money because they do not want to compromise their autonomy (Hochstetler, 1997, p. 210). Those who do seek grants have to tailor their requests to funders' agendas, as do environmental organizations throughout Latin America (Torres, 1997). And few funders are interested in sanitation projects. For example, the head of Grupo Ambientalista da Bahia (GAMBA), the premier environmental organization in the northeast state of Bahia, says that when he tried to get funding for a sanitation project from an international environmental organization, he was told that they had money only for projects related to biodiversity (Renato Cunha, personal communication, March 29, 2001).

The scarcity of money also means that most organizations have very small staffs. Indeed, many groups do not have real staffs at all. The ECOLIST survey found that 34% of grassroots organizations are run out of members' homes (Crespo, 2000). But even large, regional organizations are limited in what they can do by the small number of employees. GAMBA in Bahia provides an example. GAMBA is not only the largest and best-organized environmental organization in the state, it is a major

player in environmental politics nationwide. In existence since 1982, it operates from a suite of offices in a middle-class area of Salvador and has a paid professional staff. Yet the paid staff consists of only four people: an engineer (who is also the director), a biologist, a psychologist/educator, and a secretary. A small group of volunteers also helps out. At any given time, about three people, including the paid staff, are working in the office. From this human-resource base, GAMBA currently has campaigns on industrial pollution, agrotoxics, renewable energy, the protection of national parks, and the planned diversion of the São Francisco River, as well as a small urban-sanitation project. The chances of being able to expand the sanitation project with such a small staff are not very good. Not all environmental groups are trying to do so much with so little. Neighborhood-level groups often have quite narrow agendas, and some state-wide groups have more resources. AGAPAN in Rio Grande do Sul is an example of the latter. In general, however, environmental organizations in Brazil are already stretched too thin to put new emphases on sanitation (Ames & Keck, 1998; Crespo, 2000; Hochstetler, 1997).

Another resource problem is a shortage of expertise on sanitation policies. Because their agendas were fashioned in the political context of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, most organizations are unlikely to have contacts with, or even know much about, the government agencies accountable for sanitation. To add this issue to their agenda, or to make it more important, they would have to commit resources to learning the ropes. Environmental protection and the control of industrial pollution are the responsibility of a federal agency, the Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis, and of its state-level counterparts. The provisions of sewerage, drinking water, garbage collection, and road maintenance are state or municipal responsibilities, and they are carried out by completely different agencies. To work with (or against) them effectively, environmental groups would need to study the organizational structure of these agencies and get to know their personnel. How do things get done? What are the internal divisions? What staff can be trusted? Who is dangerous? Who is knowledgeable? Who is incompetent? No seasoned environmentalists would take on this task lightly. As Ames and Keck (1998) point out, getting such information about environmental agencies, although a big job for activists in any country, is especially difficult in Brazil, where environmental policy making is marked by jurisdictional confusion, incompetence among bureaucrats, and personalized politics (1998). There is no reason to think that information gathering would be any easier or more productive in sanitation agencies, particularly given the widespread evaluation of all administrative agencies in Latin America as weak and as inefficient (Phillip, 1999; Vanden & Prevost, 2002, pp. 187-188).

The shortages of staff, money, and expertise might be offset if environmental groups had access to another kind of resource: an already existing grassroots, urban movement dedicated to sanitation issues. Unfortunately, however, there is no such thing. There is not even a real grassroots, urban movement in Brazil over anything. Some cities do have one or more strong, effective neighborhood association. Yet these are too few and too disconnected from one another to be called a real social movement.

This has not always been the case. In the 1970s, mobilizations among the urban poor in Brazil were so numerous and so politically important that by the end of the decade, whenever anyone talked about social movements—in academic meetings, seminars, or colloquia—it was these neighborhood associations that they meant (Assies, 1991, ch. 5; Gohn, 1997, pp. 281-285). Opponents of the military regime had high hopes that the groups would eventually become so powerful that they would reduce the political might of the elites. But this has not happened, and today, neighborhood associations are greatly diminished in number and in power. Even at their peak, though, they did not organize specifically over sanitation. These were multipurpose associations, concerned with the broad sweep of problems confronting the urban poor, not just sanitation, but the lack of bus services, day care, health posts, libraries, street lighting, and schools (Alvarez, 1990; Assies, 1991; Boschi & Valladares, 1983; Mainwaring, 1987). So if environmental groups were to make sanitation one of their major projects, they would be largely on their own. Most of the people directly affected by sanitation problems are not organized and ready to help them.

## FRAMING SANITATION WITH ENVIRONMENTALISM

A third possible explanation for Brazilian environmental organizations' failures to emphasize urban sanitation is that the issue fits awkwardly with environmentalism. Sanitation has long been recognized as a problem in Brazil, but it has been construed as a public health problem. Reframing it as an environmental issue requires moving away from some of the basic ideas underpinning the international environmental movement of which Brazilian environmental groups are so much a part. All social movements reframe reality. Doing so is one of their basic tasks. A movement's creators and activists develop new ethical principles that give fresh meaning to common circumstances and events. One sort of social problem thus appears to be another sort; phenomena that once were construed as unconnected to one another become linked; a taken-for-granted situation is transformed into a social problem (Snow et al., 1986; Snow & Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 1994, pp. 118-135; Tesh, 2000, pp. 123-127). But reframing has its limits.

International environmentalism rests on a romantic foundation. It posits a past when nature was pristine, beautiful, and in perfect balance. As Rachel Carson (1962) said, there was a time when "all life seemed in harmony with its surroundings" (p. 13). Or as other environmentalists put it, human beings once "lived simply and innocently without enforcement of laws, without quarrelling, judges and libel, content only to satisfy nature" (see Worster, 1988, pp. 3-4). During those halcyon days, and here we quote from Brazilian environmentalists, of "primordial forests and rivers and animals"[21] every living thing had its proper "place in the intricate chain of being."[22] Into that perfection, people came, living, at first, in tune with nature but gradually introducing industrial processes that are now overtaking nature's capacity to renew itself (Commoner, 1972; Gore, 1992). To some thinkers, the devastating process began as early as 1492. "Columbus's discovery," writes Donald Worster, "would . . . open a long era of global destruction when . . . the entire planet's fabric of life would be torn asunder in a frenzy of greed, lust, noble ambitions and high-minded idealism" (Worster, 1988, p. 4; see also Dean, 1995). Environmentalism warns that chemical companies have contaminated rivers and lakes, that mining operations have turned mountains into barren moonscapes, that loggers and cattle ranchers have destroyed ancient forests, that shrimp farms have devastated estuaries, that agrobusinesses have poisoned the soil, that electric utility companies have fouled the air. And not just machines, not just industries; environmentalism also warns about individual people whose lifestyles threaten nature. They have consumed too many resources, driven their cars too often, taken up too much space, and failed to recycle their trash.

Some environmentalist scholars do argue that it is impossible to identify nature's so-called natural state. They show that nature is a social construction, that human beings have been modifying it since they came into existence, and that it has never been in balance (Botkin, 1990; Cronon, 1995). Nevertheless, the discourse of environmentalism calls up images of humans recently interfering with a fragile and intricate ecological network, destroying a once-unblemished natural order, and of doing so out of greed, carelessness, or stupidity. The remedy is to force or bribe or convince industries to produce products and to dispose of wastes in ways that protect nature and prevent pollution. The remedy is also to educate men and women and children to value nature more highly and to live more simply.

21. From a 2001 pamphlet titled "Rio São Francisco: Questão de Vida ou Morte" and prepared by a coalition of groups fighting against a project that would change the course of the São Francisco River.

22. From GAMBA's statement of purpose.

None of this maps well onto the problem of urban sanitation. The open-air sewers, unpaved streets, filthy beaches, and uncollected garbage that Salvadorans and that other Brazilians describe as environmental problems were not caused by rapacious industries, nor by the people who suffer from them. They are instead the direct fault of municipal governments that do not provide adequate public services to poor communities. Environmentalists certainly can, and do, blame municipal governments for their policies, but the governments are not analogous to the usual environmental culprits: the mining companies or logging businesses or chemical manufacturers who spew out toxins or deplete resources. Government actors themselves are not the ones who degrade and who pollute the environment. The pollution is actually put there by the residents of the neighborhoods. The government's fault is in not getting rid of it. But railing against the government for failing to clean up pollution just does not carry the moral outrage of railing against an industry for creating pollution (or against people or industries that decimate forests or that kill endangered species). And railing against the residents risks blaming the victim.

More importantly, the situation is not new. It has little to do with industrialization. Municipal governments in Brazil have always paid scant attention to the needs of the poor. Most of the neighborhoods where poor people live in Brazil have never had sewer systems or regular garbage collection or reliable drinking water or paved streets. So this kind of pollution now is not a break with a pristine past. Nor is urban filth a case where beautiful nature is being despoiled and a precious biodiversity is interrupted. Poor people in Brazilian cities build their houses on land that no one else wants, peripheral land that was deforested and abandoned more than 100 years before they got there. So there were no happy golden days of yore when urban folks (rich or poor) lived in harmony with nature. The before-and-after images so central to environmentalism, so applicable to endangered species or deforestation or ecosystem destruction or indigenous people, do not make much sense for urban sanitation. Environmental groups can include sanitation on their agendas, but putting it at the top hobbles their ability to spread the environmentalist message about the fragility of nature and the obligation humans beings have to live in harmony with it.

## *Concluding Comments*

We have been arguing that, despite the public's concern about urban sanitation, most Brazilian environmental organizations pay relatively little attention to the issue. And we have offered some explanations for the organizations' positions on the matter. None of this should be taken,

however, to mean that their agendas are set in stone. For one thing, political contexts are always in flux. Brazilian environmental groups, without the constraints set by their earlier dedication to state transformation and to international congresses, are free now to extend their boundaries. And the new government of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, with its commitment to reducing poverty, makes a campaign for urban sanitation less idealistic than it has ever been in Brazil. Although many of President Lula's most politically progressive supporters began criticizing his policies soon after he took office, the early policies still create political opportunities for environmental groups. One is the establishment of a Ministry of the Cities, which, although its budget is very small, proposes to make sanitation services available to every Brazilian. Another is a major nationwide initiative called Zero Hunger. Like the Ministry of the Cities, this project is poorly financed, but the Zero Hunger concept prompted progressive social reformers to say that Brazilians are hungry for education, health, and employment, as well as for food. To that list, and especially in the context of a Ministry of the Cities, it is reasonable to add urban sanitation.

This new political context also provides environmental organizations with new resources. Even with shortages of money and of staff, groups deciding to focus on sanitation could at least find it easier to get information about the sanitation bureaucracy, for the Lula government has consolidated some 20 sanitary programs into one federal agency. Other new resources may come in the form of easier alliances with the citizens who most lack sanitation services, for the existing neighborhood organizations are more inclined now to couch their demands in environmental language (Jacobs, 2002). This rhetorical turn testifies to the general spread of environmental education. But it is also the result of a new kind of framing, for environmental activists are redefining environmentalism itself. Initially a movement to protect nature from destruction, it is now increasingly embracing *socioambientalismo* or socioenvironmentalism—a more politically progressive environmentalism that focuses on the ways that environmental destruction affects people. The definition allows rubber tappers and indigenous people who fear for their livelihoods to frame their struggles as environmentalist (Conklin & Graham, 1995; Keck, 1995). By some accounts, *socioambientalismo* also includes the campaigns of landless farmers, peace activists, feminists, and union leaders (Viola, 1997). So the romantic ideas about a pristine nature being despoiled by human beings on which environmentalism was founded are now leavened by a different, more anthropocentric concept, one which makes more room for campaigns to improve urban sanitation.

Of course, at this point, we cannot know whether, with these changes in political context, available resources, and framing, environmental groups will place sanitation higher on their lists of priorities. We do know that certain constraints against doing so are lessening. But in the

interplay among all the aspects of the environmental movement—formal organizations, individual activists, and movement principles—the formal organizations are quite free to pursue an agenda that, paradoxically, fails to reflect some results of their own activism.

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*Sylvia N. Tesh is a lecturer in the Political Science Department at Yale University and is a visiting professor in Brazil at the Universidade Federal da Bahia. She is the author of* Hidden Arguments: Political Ideology and Disease Prevention Policy *and of* Uncertain Hazards: Environmental Activism and Scientific Proof.

*Eduardo Paes-Machado is a lecturer in the Sociology Department and in the Instituto de Saúde Pública at the Universidade Federal da Bahia and is a visiting professor in the United States at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. He is the author of* Poder e Participação Política no Campo.