

**COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN APPALACHIA:  
PLACE, PROTEST AND THE AEP POWER LINE**

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(ABSTRACT)

*Previously, social movement theory has focused on constructs of identity, such as race/ethnicity, gender and sexual preference, for collective identity construction. Prochansky (1983:59) introduces the concept of place identity, situating it along with the other components of identity, such as the ones mentioned above. In addition, literature on Appalachia has shown land to be an important construct of Appalachian peoples identity. This paper analyzes, through content analysis, the collective identities of writers who wrote letters to the U.S. Forest Service in opposition to a proposed AEP power line. This power line was to run through lands in Appalachia, such as various private properties, the Jefferson and George Washington National Forests, and across the New River. Collective identities based on place-identity, specifically including land, were the main target of analysis, due to the importance of land for Appalachian people. This analysis suggests that land, as a type of place identity, does serve as a basis for collective identity.*

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

In 1990, American Electric Power (AEP), then known as Appalachian Power Company (APCO), announced the need for a one hundred and fifteen mile, 765,000-volt power line in Appalachia running from Wyoming, West Virginia, near the border of Virginia to Boutetout County, Virginia, near the city of Roanoke. The proposed line was to be the largest size power line ever built (McCue 1994:B-2). Its original path was to run through numerous private properties in addition to federal properties such as the Jefferson and George Washington National Forests, the New River, and the Appalachian Trail. AEP stated that if the proposed power line were not built, there would be brown outs and power outages within the area by 1998 (Edwards 1996:A2).

Since the project was announced, a great deal of opposition to the power line has emerged. Opponents of the power line live mainly in both West Virginia and Virginia and within twelve different counties in the affected area (McCue 1994:B1). Numerous local groups have convened and hired lawyers to defend their particular interests. For example, people in Giles County, Virginia formed an organization, Citizens Organized to Protect the Environment (COPE). To fight the power line, this group has already spent over \$300,000 that they have collected from residents in a 10-county region (Braddock 1996:NRV2). The Alliance for the Preservation and Protection of Appalachian Lands is another resistance group made up of citizens from Bland, Wythe, and Tazewell Counties (Nixon 2000:B1). Many of the groups opposed to the power line are loosely organized under Arcs Inc., a coalition designed to combine the efforts of the various social movement organizations opposing the AEP power line (McCue 1994:B1).

Throughout this thesis, references will be made to Appalachia and the people who reside there. For the purpose of this thesis, Appalachia, is a region geographically defined as distinct due to physiographic boundaries, political (county) boundaries, and contiguity. It is a 213,217 square mile area in the eastern United States, based along the Appalachian Mountains. Appalachia includes 18 counties in Alabama, 59 counties in Georgia, 36 counties in Kentucky, 4 counties in Maryland, 2 counties in New Jersey, 17 counties in New York, 52 counties in North Carolina, 23 counties in Ohio, 58 counties in Pennsylvania, 16 counties in South Carolina 44, counties in Tennessee, 61 counties in Virginia and 55 counties in West Virginia. Overall, it includes 445 counties.

Counties in the metropolitan orbits of Baltimore, Washington D.C, Philadelphia and New York are not included as part of Appalachia. However, the metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Birmingham, Charleston, Knoxville, Harrisburg, Chattanooga, Charlotte, and Greenville are considered as part of Appalachia due to their importance as industrial centers for the region. Additionally, Appalachia is defined as a distinct region due to both cultural and socioeconomic factors (Raitz and Ulack 1991: 22). For this reason, areas such as the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia are included in this definition of Appalachia due to their historical and cultural significance to the entire Appalachian region (Raitz and Ulack 1991:25). This thesis will focus on a sub-region of Appalachia, that is, southern West Virginia and southwestern Virginia. However, this sub-region is still impacted by the many distinct characteristics, to be expanded upon later in this thesis, of the Appalachian region. It is not only the geographic location of many of the people opposing the AEP power line that makes many of them Appalachian, but it is also

their social and cultural factors; therefore, making Appalachian literature pertinent to this thesis.

By looking at the history of Appalachian resistance and social movement theory, an understanding of the resistance against AEP's power line can be obtained, more specifically, an understanding of the participants' mobilization via a collective identity. Collective identity refers to "the identification of the self with a group as a whole, using broad social categories to describe 'who we are' " (Thoits and Virshup 1997:106). The goal of this thesis is to determine the role of place identity, specifically including the role of land, in defining the collective identities of those participants who mobilized against the AEP power line by writing letters to the U.S. Forest Service. This analysis aims to introduce a basis of collective identity not well researched and aims to shed light on the sentiments of the power line opponents. The method of analysis will be a content analysis of letters written by individuals and groups potentially affected by the power line to assist the U.S. Forest Service in writing the required Environmental Impact Statement.

The reasons for opposition to AEP's power line are numerous. Many people opposed to the power line think that such a powerful line is not needed and fear that AEP's primary reason for wanting the line is to increase its profits with the coming of deregulated electric service (Edwards 1996:C1). Electric service deregulation will allow power line owners to sell access to their power lines to other companies. As summarized in *The Roanoke Times*, "opponents view the project as 'driven by invalid commercial motive' and remain opposed to it regardless of the route chosen" (Edwards 1994:A2).

Health concerns are also an issue. According to an article in *The Roanoke Times*, some are concerned that the electromagnetic fields associated with the high voltage

power line may increase the incidence of leukemia, especially among children who live near the lines (Kegley 1993:A7). In addition, according to another article in *The Roanoke Times*, more than one hundred people in a five-mile radius of AEP's Jacksons Ferry substation and power lines have contracted cancer (Nixon 2000:B1). This alone has people very concerned.

Others fear the environmental damage the line might possibly bring, especially to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests, the New River, and the Appalachian Trail. Environmental concerns revolve around air quality, water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation and aesthetics (McCue 1994:B1). In addition, those who own land on or near the proposed power line fear that their property values will go down. The Giles County Board of Supervisors notes that, "The line would be detrimental to property owners, the environment and to the economic well being of the county" (Braddock 1996:NRV7).

Lastly, some people believe that the power line will impose on land that has been in their families for generations. In an article in *The Roanoke Times* on May 2, 2000, Barbara Thompson of Bland County, Virginia talks about her family's cattle farm that is to turn 200 years old in 2004 and maintains, "I don't want those 765-kv lines to be the birthday candles on the cake" (Nixon 2000:B1).

The principal proponent of the power line, American Electric Power, states that the power line is necessary to supply power to the area. In addition, it maintains that the construction of the power line will bring jobs and revenue: "1,260 four year construction jobs, 1,500 to 3,600 permanent jobs, 2.4 million to 5.8 million tons of additional coal mined yearly, \$24.5 million to \$50.6 million in additional tax revenues each year and

\$2.6 million to \$58.7 million in additional payroll yearly" (Hensley, 1996:A9). Other proponents, such as the Coalition for Energy and Economic Revitalization (formed in 1993, composed of 519 member groups that represent 273,000 people), think that the power line's presence will provide their towns with the needed infrastructure to attract outside businesses (No Author, 1996:C3). The addition of new business means jobs, a necessity in many of the areas potentially affected by the power line. Lastly and most commonly, many proponents fear that if the new power line is not built, they will experience brown outs and power outages.

In the ten years since APCO made its first proposal, thirteen different alternate routes have been proposed. The United States Forest Service released its Environmental Impact Statement in 1996 suggesting a "no-action" course of action, "meaning that it won't allow the proposed 765,000-volt line to cross the national forest" (McCue 1996:A1). In order to build the power line, AEP needs permission from both the West Virginia and Virginia State Corporation Commissions (McCue 1996:A1). Recently (October 2000), a route was decided on by the Virginia State Corporation Commissions (Nixon and Caliri 2000: A1). However, opposition to the power line is not expected to stop.

As mentioned, people oppose the power line for many reasons, but an understanding of their mobilization against the power line has yet to be explored. Social movement theory gives us the tools to understand mobilization. As Zald (in Morris & Mueller 1992:332) states, "behavior entails cost; therefore grievances or deprivation do not automatically or easily translate into social movement theory". In other words, opposition and beliefs do not necessarily translate into behavior, as reflected in the degree

of mobilization by participants opposing the AEP power line. This degree of mobilization against the power line was unexpected by its chief proponent, AEP, as shown by the current four-year delay in its construction completion date. Why have people mobilized in opposition to the construction of AEP's 765,000-kv power line?

Resistance in Appalachia, such as opposition to AEP's proposed power line, is nothing new. Beginning in the late 19th century, Appalachia and many of its people have been faced with constant transition and change. "As capitalists worked to bring the resources of the land into the industrial age, intellectuals strove to 'uplift' and 'Americanize' the mountaineers" (Eller 1982:43). The history of Appalachian resistance reveals that "it has most frequently occurred in struggles to preserve traditional values and ways of life against the forces of modernization" (Fisher 1993:4). Thus, the extraction of coal and timber by outside investors set the stage for Appalachian resistance, beginning as early as the 1920s (Fisher 1993: 3). With the extraction of these natural resources, many people in Appalachia found themselves at the mercy of outside capitalists and unable to go back to the simpler, mountain life that they once had.

Much of the resistance in Appalachia prior to the 1960's, however, was not organized, i.e., not within a conventional social movement organization. During the 1960's, the environmental and women's movements, and especially the anti-war and student movements, "called into question the notions of 'progress', 'modernization' and 'national interest' that had been used so long to justify the destruction of traditional ways of life in Appalachia"(Fisher 1993:5) and served to legitimate resistance movements in Appalachia. The traditional role of women, the treatment of the environment, and confidence in the government were all challenged by the social movement organizations

of the 1960's, which in turn, indirectly challenged the exploitation of many Appalachian people and resources by outside capitalists and gave many Appalachian people a basis on which to act.

Examples of social movement organizations in Appalachia after 1960 are the black lung movement, the Yellow Creek movement and the save our Cumberland Mountains movement. The black lung movement, at its peak in the 1960's and 1970's, arose in West Virginia among coal miners to seek recognition and compensation for a disease called "coal workers' pneumoconiosis" caused from the dust in underground coal mines in which they worked (Judkins 1993:225). The Yellow Creek movement, beginning in 1980 in Middlesboro, Kentucky, arose to protest the dumping of waste from production processes of a tanning company into the nearby Yellow Creek used for much of the town's water supply (Cable 1993:76). The save our Cumberland Mountains movement started in 1972 and consisted of residents from five counties in Tennessee. Objectives of this movement focused on the problems of overweight coal trucks destroying rural roads, mining companies failing to pay property taxes, and stream flooding caused by coal companies strip mining (Allen 1993:86).

Other social movement organizations in Appalachia have focused more on symbolic capital, i.e., capital based on an image of respectability and honourability (Bourdieu 1984:291) such as land, family and regional history, and local and regional identity for the basis of their resistance. This differs from other social movement organizations in Appalachia that primarily focused on objective issues, such as health and property taxes (Foster 1988:320). This was the case for Ashe County, North Carolina residents and their social movement organization the Committee for the New River.

Participants in Ashe County mobilized against Appalachian Power Company (APCO) and its proposed Blue Ridge Project designed to generate electric power by damming the New River in Ashe County. Participants were motivated to mobilize by more than just the physical state of the New River. One participant in Foster's book , The Past Is Another Country, written solely about the mobilization of participants against the Blue Ridge Project, is quoted as saying, "The New River is part of our heritage" (1988:139) Another participant (in Foster 1988:135) states,

The New River is part of my growing up. The thought of it damned, its lovely course swallowed by a lake, the mountain coves and valleys drowned forever cuts like a knife...If and when the New River vanishes, a part of my life will go with it.

It is this sort of sentiment that mobilized participants to fight off the Blue Ridge Project.

To understand the mobilization of participants in social movement organization, social movement theory is an essential, analytical tool. Literature on social movement organizations focuses on different explanations for participant mobilization. Prior to the 1970's, social movement theorists focus on grievances and irrationality as incentive for mobilization (Mueller 1992:4). Such theorists assume the "existence of potential conflicts and strains would automatically generate people to correct them" (Larana et al. 1994:4). Rational choice and resource mobilization theories amend the literature by acknowledging the omnipresence of strain throughout history and by stressing the importance of both "rational orientation to action" and resources for mobilization (Larana et al. 1994:5). New social movement theory emphasizes collective identity as a necessity for mobilization. Taylor and Whittier state that "the study of collective identity, because it highlights the role of meaning and ideology in the mobilization and maintenance of collective action, is an important key to understanding this process" (1992:122).

“The collective identity of a social movement organization (SMO) is a shorthand designation announcing a status – a set of attitudes, commitments, and rules for behavior – that those who assume the identity can be expected to ascribe to” (Friedman and McAdam 1992:157). Thoits and Virshup (1997:107) explain collective identity as the "identification of the self with a group as a whole, using broad categories to describe 'who we are'." Thoits and Vishop (1997:127) also stress the importance of “social roles (as well as sociodemographic characteristics, other social types of persons, and personality traits)” in producing collective-level identities. In all, collective identity is a definition widely shared by group members about the group's attitudes, commitments, and attributes.

Place identity is a type of identity that is key to understanding the mobilization against the AEP power line. According to Shumaker and Taylor (1983:227), Proshansky defines place as “one component out of many that produces an individual’s self-identity”. In addition, Prochansky (in Feirmer & Geller 1983:227) defines place identity as:

those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to the this environment.

Place is based on the individual's interaction with his/her physical environment, rather than his/her gender, ethnicity or sexual preference. I will argue that place identity can be both a collective level identity and an individual identity.

The history of resistance in Appalachia, specifically against The Blue Ridge Project, shows the importance of symbolic capital for many people in Appalachia (Foster

1988). In addition, previous literature, as mentioned above and to be elaborated on later in this thesis, recognizes collective identity among social movement participants as a means of mobilization and place as a means of identity construction. Thus, this thesis inquires: how and in what ways does place identity affect the collective identities of those mobilizing against AEP's power line?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The first section of my literature review will examine the relevant research on collective identity. I will first place the concept of collective identity within the literature on social movement organizations and participant mobilization. Definitions of collective identity, as well as the necessary factors for collective identity formation, will also be discussed. In addition, I will review the role of collective identities in various other social movement organizations. This will be followed by literature on place identity to illustrate how land, as a basis of place, can serve as a construct of identity, specifically in Appalachia. Lastly, literature on the importance of place and land in Appalachia, that is, historically, recreationally, for familial roots and as a basis of identity, will be reviewed in order to link the participants, Appalachians, mobilizing against the AEP power line with the literature on place identity and collective identity. This literature review sheds light on how land, as an important basis of place identity in Appalachia, could therefore, be a critical aspect in constructing the collective identities of those mobilizing against the AEP power line.

### Social Movement Organizations and Collective Identity

Many social movement scholars seek to understand and explain what mobilizes people to participate in organized resistance or, more specifically, in social movements. Originally, social movement theory focused on social psychological concepts and depicted grievances as the major motivating factor (Mueller 1992:4). Early social movement theory "furthered a focus on strains and conflicts in social structure as the

sources of movement formation, dissent, and protest activity" (Johnston et al. 1994:4). From this perspective, social movement organizations were shaped and defined by strain and grievances.

In contrast to grievances, rational choice theory emphasizes participation in social movement organizations as the most rewarding choice for the participants (Friedman and McAdam 1992:159). The concept of rational choice paved the way for resource mobilization theory by introducing the idea of the rational actor (Mueller 1992:6). Beginning in the 1970's, resource mobilization theory characterizes participants in social movements as resource dependent and as more rational than previously depicted by social movement theorists (Mueller 1992:6). Rational choice and resource mobilization theories recognize the omnipresence of strain in society, but stress the importance of both resources and rational action for mobilization (Johnston et al. 1994:5).

In the last two decades, the arrival of advanced industrialized societies, both in Europe and North America, has brought new types of social movements and new ways of conceptualizing them (Johnston et al. 1994:3). New social movement theory argues that earlier social movement theories were too narrow and "did not grasp the everyday and identity dimensions of the 'old movements' they sought to explain" (Johnston et al. 1994:28). New social movement theory recognizes the quest for identity as the main goal of group formation (Johnston et al. 1994:28) along with grievances. Melucci (in Gamson 1992:56) further states the importance of identity in participant mobilization.

### *Defining Collective Identity*

Definitions of collective identity are somewhat vague and variable. Thoits and Vishop (1997: 107) define collective identity as the identification of the self with a group as a whole. Friedman and McAdam (1992:157) define collective identity as, “a shorthand designation announcing a status – a set of attitudes, commitments, and rules for behavior – that those who assume the identity can be expected to ascribe to”. Melucci (in Larana et al. 1994:15) introduces the concepts of "interactional" and "shared" to the definition of collective identity, explaining that several individuals or groups interactionally produce a shared definition of the group based on their orientations of actions, their field of opportunities, and their constraints. Additionally, Taylor and Whittier (in Shriver et al. 2000:46) introduce the concept of politics to the definition of collective identity defining it as the “politicization of the self and daily life”. Many theorists offer interpretations of collective identity; however, each only emphasizes one dimension of collective identity. For the purpose of this thesis, collective identity is a shared definition of who the group is in regard to one or more of the following: the group's attitudes, commitments, and attributes, as well as the social world including the participants' norms, values, etc., the definition of the problem at hand, and/or the legitimacy of the grievances. Additionally, collective identity is produced through the interaction of individuals or groups and is based on some or all of those individuals or groups characteristics, such as their attitudes, commitments, rules, opportunities, constraints, individual selves, and their daily life. It is in the participants communicating their definition of the group that it becomes shared and thus, a collective identity.

*The Formation of Collective Identity: Boundaries, Consciousness and Identity*

Based on the premise that collective identity is interactional, Taylor and Whittier (1992) identify three important factors that are essential in understanding how collective identity is constructed: boundaries, consciousness and negotiations. Boundaries are:

the social, psychological, and physical structures that establish differences between a challenging group and a dominant group. ... For any subordinate group, the construction of a positive identity requires both a withdrawal from the values and structures of the dominant, oppressive society and the creation of new self-affirming values and structures (Taylor and Whittier 1992:111).

In other words, by establishing how the group, “we,” is different from others, “they,” the group establishes its collective identity. William Gamson (1992:55) further explains the creation of “we” by stating:

collective identity concerns the mesh between the individual and the cultural systems...[and] how individuals sense of who they are becomes engaged with a definition shared by co-participants in some effort at local change-that is, with who ‘we are’.

Johnston, Larana and Gusfield (1994:16) state that identity, whether collective or individual, is “both cognitively real – that is, based on lived experience and knowledge stored in memory”. This link between the individuals or participants are the shared experiences and/or the cultural system among them. When the participants work together, this link becomes a defined “we.” In other words, individuals develop a collective identity. Looking at what binds the participants mobilizing against the AEP power line and their defined “we,” gives one a beginning for understanding the basis of their collective identity.

The interactional basis of collective identity brings forth the concept of consciousness, another very important factor for establishing collective identity.

Consciousness refers “to the interpretive frameworks that emerge from a group’s struggle to define and realize members’ common interests in opposition to the dominant order” (Taylor and Whittier 1992:114). A group’s consciousness is often expressed through their formal writings, speeches, and documents. More importantly, a group’s consciousness is always changing as it adjusts to different experiences, opportunities, and interests that are made available to the group (Taylor and Whittier 1994:114). It is the consciousness of social movement participants that makes their collective identity comparable to a ‘moving target’ with different definitions prevailing throughout the movement's duration, as a result of mutual influence between the individual identities of the participants and the collective identity of the group (Johnston et al. 1994:16). Joshua Gamson (1995:236) summarizes the continuity of collective identity and its consciousness best with his quote from Craig Calhoun that , “as lived, identity is always project, not settled accomplishment”. For those participants mobilizing against AEP’s power lines, an established “we” based on land attachment alone is not enough for the formation of a collective identity. Instead, it is through the participants’ pronouncement, acknowledgement and politicization through vehicles such as, documents and/or speeches that a group's consciousness is built and in turn, their collective identity is created.

Negotiation is another factor important in establishing a collective identity. “Negotiation encompasses the symbols and everyday actions subordinate groups use to resist and restructure existing systems of domination” (Taylor and Whittier 1994:111). Negotiation can further be defined as “the process by which social movements work to change symbolic meanings” (Taylor and Whittier 1994:118). Negotiation assists in the boundary making and in consciousness raising by further establishing, via protest

activities, group meetings, and symbols, the differences in the everyday practices between the subordinate group and the dominant group. In summary, it is through a group's negotiations that participants are able to continuously increase the group's consciousness and define the group's boundaries even more distinctly.

Boundaries, consciousness and negotiation are all necessary analytical tools to understand and investigate the collective identity of those participants mobilizing against the AEP power line. For example, it is not enough to say that those mobilizing all value the land. This value must be set in contrast to the values and structures of those whom they are opposing (Taylor and Whittier 1994:111), in this case the proponents of the power line. In addition, "interpretive frameworks" must be given to the determined value of the subordinate group, the opponents of the AEP power line, which then must be expressed through their symbols and everyday actions (Taylor and Whittier 1994:111). This whole process must occur in order for participants against the AEP power line to mobilize.

### *The Role of Collective Identity in Other SMO's*

The role of collective identity in those mobilizing against the AEP power line can be better understood by looking at the role collective identity has played in various other social movement organizations. C-10, Citizens within the Ten mile Radius, is a group that formed in spring of 1986 to oppose the licensing of the Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire. Unfortunately, outsiders and proponents of the power plant associated C-10 with other social movement organizations that had previously opposed the Seabrook nuclear power plant and characterized them too as "naive idealists or 'wacko' environmentalists" (Adair 1996:350). To counter such claims, participants of

C-10 defined themselves as "ordinary, respectable people" concerned about "the safety of their families, friends and neighbors" In the end, it was due to lack of control over their "public image and self-definition" that C-10 was unable to accomplish the goals of its organization (Adair 1996:372). Public image and self-definition are important factors for the success of a social movement organization. In many cases, as in the case of C-10, lack of control over public image and self-definition may lead to the failure of a social movement organization.

The strength of a social movement organization's collective identity is also essential for its success. This can be seen in the case of those mobilizing in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in 1989. In Oak Ridge, Tennessee, residents created a collective identity in order to prevent the mobilization of those residents in opposition to the nuclear reservation. Oak Ridge, a community economically dependent on a nuclear reservation recognized as an environmental and health hazard by the United States government, used the residents' collective identity, defined by their dependence on the nuclear reservation, to squash any resident's activism against the reservation. Because of the Oak Ridge residents' accomplishment in establishing such a strong collective identity, activism against the reservation was never able to flourish. The collective identity of the Oak Ridge residents is a less common case in which the majority mobilized to inhibit mobilization in their opposition as opposed to other cases of collective identity where the majority facilitates mobilization for the purpose of opposition to something else (Shriver et. al 2000).

A last example addresses the role of local culture in shaping a social movement organization's collective identity. In Ashe County, North Carolina, the role of local

culture was significant in constructing the collective identity of those mobilizing, starting in May of 1968, against the Blue Ridge Project, designed to generate electric power by damming the New River. Opponents of the Blue Ridge Project and residents of Ashe County held the New River Festival in order to raise consciousness and reaffirm their identity, specifically in opposition to the interests of the Blue Ridge Project's proponents. The festival was held on a farm, worked by the same family for more than two hundred years, in which craftspeople sold their woodcarvings, hand-made quilts, and other wares. In addition, information on the history of the New River was dispersed along with information on its geological importance (Foster 1988:140). The aim of the festival was to reinforce those values important to the local culture, such as the land and the New River, in order to shape a collective identity, essential for mobilization against the proponents of the Blue Ridge Project. Local culture proved to be a strong basis for those participants mobilizing against the Blue Ridge Project.

The role of collective identity in social movement organizations is an important one. The lack of successful collective identity construction, as seen in the case of C-10, can prevent a social movement organization from accomplishing its goal. Conversely, the presence of a successful collective identity, as seen with the residents of Oak Ridge, can lead to the accomplishment of a social movements goals either through participant mobilization or in the case of the Oak Ridge residents, suppression of participant mobilization. Lastly, as seen with the residents of Ashe County, North Carolina, the collective identity of a social movement organization can be assisted by the use of local culture and reaffirmed through events, such as the New River Festival. These examples of collective identity and its role in social movement organizations shed light on the

complexity and importance of collective identity for those mobilizing against the AEP power line.

### *Collective Identity from Individual Identity and vice versa*

The collective identities of the participants of C-10, of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and of Ashe County, North Carolina were all based on shared individual similarities. C-10 participants all shared health concerns regarding the licensing of the Seabrook nuclear power plant, Oak Ridge participants all shared economic dependence on the nearby nuclear reservation, and Ashe County participants all shared the local culture of the County and the New River. Thoits and Virshup (1997:127) explain that “social roles (as well as sociodemographic characteristics, other social types of persons, and personality traits) may serve as individual-level identities or as collective-level identities.” C-10, Oak Ridge, and Ashe County participants were individually defined by their shared similarities, as well as collectively defined by their individual similarities. In sum, individual identities and concerns become collective in the process of mobilization. The following reviews literature on place as a construct and type of identity for both the individual and the collective.

### Place-Identity Theory and the Importance of Land in Appalachia

To understand place identity, the concept of place must first be analyzed. Fritz Steele (1981:9) offers one of the most encompassing definitions of place:

The concept of place should actually be psychological or interactional, not just physical. The environment is made of a combination of physical and social features; the sense of place is an experience created by the setting combined with what a person brings to it. In other words, to some degree we create our own places, they do not exist independent of us.

In sum, a space can not be defined as a place with out people and people can not be defined without place.

Originally, place-identity theory was based on Fried's (1963) concept of spatial identity. Fried (2000:197) describes spatial identity as "the physical/geographic dimensions within which houses, streets, even whole communities can bound, intensify, and provide a spatial locus for identification and community attachment linked to social group identity". In 1978, the concept of spatial identity was translated into place identity by Prochansky and his colleagues (Fried 2000:197). Prochansky (1983:59) situates place identity as a component of identity along with gender, social class, ethnic background, occupation, religion and so on. He defines place identity as:

those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of consciousness and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment (Prochansky 1978:155).

It is from Prochansky's definition of place identity that most research on the concept of place identity stems. For example, Fried (2000:197) situates place identity as subordinate to other components of identity, such as "family history, gender roles, ethnic commitments and social commitments", but acknowledges the impact of place on these other components of identity. For example, one who lives in the mountains will most likely have a family history that involves elements of mountain life, such as coal mining and farming. In contrast, one who lives in the city will most likely have a family history that involves elements of city life. Cuba and Hummon (1993:114) point out the importance of symbolic contexts for place identification. They give the examples of

public landmarks, local myths and city heroes as perpetuators of place-identity. It is through the consistent sight of a local landmark(s) or through the consistent telling of a local myth(s) that the identity of a place can be maintained and passed on.

Attachment to place is major component of place identity. Place attachment refers to "the emotional or affective bond between an individual and a particular place" (Williams et al. 1992:31). Williams et al. (1992:31) further elaborates that this bond may "vary in intensity from immediate sensory delight to long lasting and deeply rooted attachment". Social involvements, such as friends, kin, organizational memberships and local shopping, are important in determining sentimental ties to place. Long-term residence is also critical as both contributing to place identity and as building sentimental attachment to place and of sense of home (Cuba and Hummon 1993:115).

In all, places offer answers to the age-old identity question, "Who am I? – by countering – Where am I? or Where do I belong?" (Cuba and Hummon 1993:112). In reference to collective identity, places can answer - Who are we? - by countering Where are we? or Where do we belong? Because places are bound spaces painted with personal, social, and cultural meanings, they inevitably construct, maintain and transform identity (Cuba and Hummon 1993:112). In sum, place identity along with place attachment co-exists in varying degrees for every space that is a place.

#### *Place in Appalachia and the Importance of Land:*

Literature on Appalachia has shown that there are many components to place in Appalachia. Places embody historical and social, as well as physical dimensions. Land, family members, and material structures are important components of place. For many

people in Appalachia, place "denotes a piece of property and thus implies a relationship between it and its owner. A place is a plot of ground permanently defined not only by legal possession but also by human occupance" ( Allen 1990:158). In sum, places are culturally and historically important, as well as they provide many people in Appalachia with familial roots.

For many Appalachian people, land is synonymous with place. This sentiment is best depicted in the following quote regarding land and the local environment. "It (land) is influenced by present conditions, perceptions, past linkages and hopes and dreams of the future. It is the very essence of sense of place" (Cox 1988:249). Because of many Appalachian peoples' close interaction with the land, they have given land a strong sense of place. Because of this close interaction, land serves as a significant construct of identity for many Appalachian people.

Authors have pointed out for many people in Appalachia land serves as a basis of identity in a number of ways. Many Appalachian people feel that their land defines them. Foster (1988:135) quotes a person from Appalachia as saying, "Many of the people ... say that they do not merely own their land. They say that they are part of it and its part of them". This view of the land is characteristic of long-established indigenous communities, such as those in Appalachia. Land in Appalachia is not just seen a commodity by many Appalachian people, to be traded and exploited, but is seen as something sacred and as part of their being (Young 1998:79). Foster (1988:167) best summarizes this view of land as a defining characteristic for many people in Appalachia with a quote from David M. Schneider, who in 1976 wrote on the linkage between ancestors and present persons. He quotes, "what they mean by land and place is very

close to what they mean by blood. Both are substantive, both are natural, and both are symbols which define a person's identity ...".

Additionally, land is a means of establishing familial roots for many Appalachian people. Roots refer to one's "ties to their ancestors and to their land" (Foster 1988:167). Foster 1988:167) further explains that "one knows who one is by knowing whom one belongs (one's family) and as well as to whom one belongs (one's land)". He contrasts this with one who has no family or land and who therefore, has an unsure and unstable social identity. Cox (1988: 249) best explains the Appalachian people's connection between land and familial roots. "It is the locus of his memories, the place he reared his children, the final resting place of generations of his ancestors, and the place where he will be returned to earth." In other words, land and family ground people and give them the basis for their identity.

Land provides a basis of history for many Appalachian people. Land not only situates a person within history but it also encompasses him/her within the history of the land and the place. In addition, one's family history or blood is interwoven with the history of the land and place (Foster 1988:168). Allen (1990:161) provides an example of this sentiment in a quote she obtains from a gentleman who lives in Appalachia, "You know when you look around," he said simply, "that you're seeing the same things they saw." For many Appalachian people, land is the basis of their history and as a result, their identity. The past, for many Appalachian people, is a conglomeration of experiences by which their social and cultural identities are based (Foster 1988:157).

Land ownership assures independence for many Appalachian people. By owning land, one has secured a definite identity and is "beholden to no one" (Foster 1988:169).

A violation of land is not only a violation of one's personal identity but also, according to Foster (1988:169), a violation of both local identity and culture. Prochansky (1983:61) comments that it is not until one's sense of place is threatened that he/she becomes aware of his/her place. Many Appalachian people have a strong sense of place and place identity due to their long history of threat from outside investors, such as the threat from AEP and its power line.

Lastly, land is important recreationally. Appalachia is the home of the Appalachian Trail, the Jefferson and George Washington National Forests along with various other national and local parks, the New River, and the Blue Ridge mountains. Wellman (1987:5) points out that "Americans have repeatedly affirmed that wildland recreation (such as that on The Jefferson and George Washington National Forests etc.) is a vital component of our national life." In addition, emotional bonds are created with long-term relationships to place, specifically recreational settings. As people who recreate make emotional bonds to the setting in which they recreate, their willingness to substitute their recreational setting reduces. In addition, their concern over the care and management of the setting in which they recreate increases (Williams et al. 1992:32). In sum, recreational settings are important both nationally and to the individual. In Appalachia, recreational settings are important to those who live there, as well as to those who frequently recreate there.

Overall, the attachment to place and the land by many Appalachian people is "an attachment to family, kin and neighbors, to shared experiences that imply responsibility beyond the self and provide linkages between the past and the future" (Eller 1988:4). Land not only provides many Appalachian people with an identity but it also provides

many of them with a sense of being rooted and with a culturally important past. Lastly, land in Appalachia is important recreationally for those who live there and for those who do not. In sum, by being in control of the land, Appalachian people feel in control of themselves. By attempting to control the land, as many outsiders have done and as AEP attempts to do, both the individual and local identity, as well as, the culture of the Appalachia is threatened.

Because place and land are significant bases of identity for many Appalachian people, they are important to consider when analyzing the collective identities of those participants mobilizing against AEP. For many Appalachian people, land is capital with symbolic value, rather than a commodity, as viewed by AEP and others, to be bought and sold. By looking at the role of place, specifically including land, in constructing the collective identities of those mobilizing against AEP's power line, a greater understanding of the symbolic impact of the power line on those mobilizing can be obtained. Theoretically, the concept of collective identity will be broadened to include place identity.

Overall, this thesis aims to answer the following questions: What are the collective identities of those who wrote letters opposing the AEP power line? More specifically, to what extent do those who mobilized by writing letters to the U.S. Forest Service identify land, as a basis of place identity, as their reason for opposition? In sum, this thesis inquires: What role does place identity, specifically including land, have in constructing the collective identities of those mobilizing against the AEP power line?

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Content analysis was used to determine how place identity is a basis of the collective identities of those mobilizing against the AEP power line. A content analysis extracts and classifies important examples, themes, and patterns in the data being analyzed (Patton 1987:149). Letters written to the U.S. Forest Service served as the data for analysis. These letters were written in 1996 within a ninety-day comment period, July 1<sup>st</sup> through October 31<sup>st</sup>, by both local and non-local residents of Virginia and West Virginia and out of state residents. The U.S. Forest Service used these letters, as specified before hand, as data to write the Environmental Impact Statement. The U.S. Forest Service numbered the letters, 1 through 1651, and bound them in numeric order.

Of the 1651 letters written, 300 letters (about 18% of the total) were selected randomly. The sample, 300 letters, was chosen on the basis that it should provide a sufficient amount of data for analysis within the time available. I generated 300 random numbers to represent the letters to be analyzed. Any letters in favor of the power line I excluded from the analysis and replaced, as the main focus is on those who oppose the power line. In addition, approximately 538 form letters were excluded from the analysis and replaced.

The letters were first analyzed according to the writer's reason for opposition to the power line. For example, those letters that mentioned opposition to the power line for health reasons were placed in one category, those that mentioned its lack of necessity were placed in another category, and those that mentioned concerns regarding land were placed in a third category. A fourth category was created to contain all other reasons for

opposition. Letters mentioning more than one reason were placed in more than one category.

Letters that identify land as a reason for opposition were further analyzed to determine the different themes underlying the opposition. Land's importance as a generational link, "roots"; "threats to recreational uses", such as the Appalachian Trail; its "decreased value" due to the power line; "negative environmental impacts" caused by the power line; "threat to aesthetics "; its importance in defining the writer's sense of self, "defines", and "cultural attachment" to the land were the themes coded. A last category coded, "other themes based on land", consisted of any additional themes.

To seek out evidence of collective identities, specifically collective identities based on place identity, the main features of collective identity, that is, boundaries, consciousness, and negotiations, were used as tools. For example, the mention of shared social similarities, such as values, norms and attitudes, and shared physical/geographical similarities distinguishing those in opposition to the power line from those in favor of the power line were used as indicators of boundary making among participants. The mention of a story of involvement in opposition by the writer, of common interests among the writer and members and/or referral to any documents or speeches written by those involved in opposition were used as indicators of consciousness among participants. Lastly, the mention of meetings among the writer and others, the mention of participation in protest activities and the mention of symbols representing opposition to the power line were used as indicators of negotiations.

Additional variables coded were the letter number, the date of the letter, the address of the sender as noted on the letter, the number of people represented by each

letter, whether or not the writer mentioned an affiliation with a particular group and/or whether or not he/she mentioned being a native of the locality mentioned in the letter. Additionally, the primary theme of each letter was coded using the previously created categories regarding reason for opposition and reasons for opposition regarding the land.

Finally, frequencies were generated of themes regarding opposition to the power line, specifically themes regarding place-identity and including land. Frequencies regarding the indicators of boundaries, consciousness and negotiations were also generated in order to determine the degree to which these indicators of collective identity were present in the letters. The quantitative results generated were used to guide the qualitative analysis of the letters.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

My research questions were, (1) What are the collective identities of the letter writers, (2) To what extent was land, as a type of place identity, identified as a reason for opposition to the power line, and (3) To what extent did place identity, specifically involving land, have in constructing the collective identities of those opposing the AEP power line? These questions are addressed by the content analysis. To begin, the overall reasons mentioned for opposition will be summarized. This will be followed by a summary of the reasons mentioned for opposition based on land. In addition, the primary reasons for opposition based on land and bases of place identity, determined by the reason written most about or labeled so, will be summarized. Following, the distribution of the indicators of collective identity, i.e., boundaries, consciousness, and negotiations, mentioned in the letters will be given. Other important findings regarding the possible collective identities of the letter writers will follow. Finally, the letter writers' collective identities that are based on place identity, specifically involving land, will be discussed.

### Summary of Reasons Mentioned Regarding Opposition

#### *Overview of All Reasons*

To assess the various collective identities, specifically those based on place identity, of those who wrote letters to the U.S. Forest Service in opposition to the AEP power line, a summary of the reasons mentioned for opposition is helpful. The frequency distribution (Table 4.1) of reasons mentioned for opposing the power line shows that reasons relating to the land are cited much more often than those relating to health, lack of need for the power line and other reasons. This infers that the collective identities of

the letter writers have a greater chance of being based on land than on health, lack of need for the power line, and other reasons mentioned.

**Table 4.1 Reasons for Opposing**

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Land	82.7%
Lack of Need for the Power Line	14.7
Health	11.7
Other	12.3
	N = 300

Note: The total % does not equal 100 due to some writers mentioning more than one reason.

Of the total letter writers, 82.7% mentioned reasons for opposition that pertain to the land. These reasons will be discussed more fully in the following paragraphs. Statements coded as lack of need for the power line, mentioned by 14.7% of the letter writers, included, “I think the need for this power line has not be demonstrated” and “I have not seen a real need for this power line expressed in clear accessible terms. (Need doesn’t include profit to APCO shareholders).” Statements coded as opposition in regard to health, as mentioned by 11.7% of the letter writers, included, “The erosion and ground water contamination effects ... have direct and immediate impact on human lives,” “the safety risk of a high voltage power line in ready access to inquisitive children is unacceptable to us” and “psychological harm seem(s) to far outweigh the potential benefits.” Finally, other reasons for opposition to the power line's construction, mentioned by 12.3% of the letter writers, included, “If constructed it could set a precedent for similar projects in other areas” and “This area is poor. I am enclosing a

copy of an executive order of not picking poor areas to build – to seek environmental justice” and “ to make the world a better place,” by not constructing the power line.

*Overview of Reasons Pertaining to Land*

Since most reasons for opposing the power line were based on land and since this thesis inquires the role of place identity, specifically including land, in constructing the collective identities of the letter writers, more attention was given to the breakdown of themes regarding place identity and land. Many of the letter writers who did mention reasons for opposition based on place identity and land, however, made no mention of group identification. It is by looking at Table 4.2 that a better understanding of the reasons mentioned for opposition based on place identity and land can be obtained.

**Table 4.2. Reasons for Opposing - Based on Land**

<i>Reasons Based on Land</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Bases of Place Identity:</b>	
Threat to Recreational Uses	39.7%
Cultural Attachment	12.3
Historical Significance	10.7
Familial Roots	3.0
Defines Oneself	1.7
<b>Non-Bases of Place Identity:</b>	
Negative Environmental Impacts	32.0
Threat to Aesthetics	29.7
Decrease in Land Value	9.7
Other Reasons too Vague to Classify	<u>1.7</u>
	N = 300

Note: The total % does not equal 100 due to some writers mentioning more than one reason.

As the literature on place in Appalachia shows, place is a basis of identity for many Appalachian people in that it defines them, it establishes familial roots, and it

provides them with a basis for their history and culture. Due to the recreational opportunities in Appalachia, land alone in Appalachia is a basis for the identities of both residents and non-residents who recreate there often. For this reason and for the purpose of my thesis, reasons for opposition that are based on land but that are not bases of place identity are addressed separately, as they are not significant in answering my research questions.

Negative environmental impacts, threats to aesthetics, and the devaluing of personal property are reasons for opposition that are based on land but that are not bases of place-identity. The negative impact of the power line on the environment, mentioned by 32% of the writers, was the second most frequently mentioned reason for opposition based on land. A statement coded for opposition due to the negative impacts of the power line on the environment included, "It (the power line) is destructive to the environment." A statement coded for opposition due to the threat to aesthetics of the land, mentioned by 29.7% of the letter writers, included, "The proposed transmission line will have long term, adverse impacts on the visual landscape." A statement coded reason for opposition due to decrease in land value, mentioned by 9.7% of the writers, included, "Therefore the presence of the 756Kv line would devalue the property as a whole as well as devaluing the various tracts. If the property is destroyed for development, and timber is damaged, and aesthetic factors neglected, the farm is stripped for value." Finally, 1.7 % of the writers gave reasons based on land that were too vague to classify. An example of statement coded others that are too vague to classify included, "The reasons for building such a line would have to be imperative indeed to justify so much of destruction of the values that the Forest represents."

Defines oneself, familial roots, historically significant, cultural attachment and threat to recreational uses, are all reasons based on land that also serve as a bases of place identity. Recreational purposes, mentioned by 39.7% of the writers, was the most mentioned reason for opposition based on land by the letter writers. Examples of statements coded threats to recreational uses include, “The proposed routing of the power line would hurt the experience of the hikers on the Appalachian Trail” and “People visit the National Forest to get away from the industrialization and to enjoy the natural world. If our country can not maintain a piece of land the size of the Jefferson National Forest that is free from power lines, than I think we are a hopeless nation.” Cultural attachment to the land, mentioned by 12.3% of the writers, was the fourth most mentioned reason for opposing the power line due to land but the second most mentioned reason as a means of place identity. A statement coded for opposition due to cultural attachment was, “We believe that it is important to protect cultures with strong traditional attachments to high-quality rural landscapes.” The historical significance of various areas and the land was mentioned as a concern by 10.7% of the writers. “I am also concerned that the proposed line will cross and disturb or destroy historically sensitive sites-areas,” is an example of one statement coded as a reference to historical significance. Other comments concerning historical significance were in regards to the Appalachian Trail. Approximately six writers wrote that they saw “the Appalachian Trail as a legacy for future generations” and that it needed to be protected from the construction of the power line. Familial roots was a reason for opposition mentioned by 3% of the letter writers. For example, two writers said, “To destroy the land would be to destroy the people and their rich and verified heritage” and “Without my home and

my land and the memories and those of my relatives who came before me I feel like I have no roots.” Finally, only 1.7% of the writers mentioned opposition to the power line due to the feelings that the land defined them. For example, one person wrote, “we are part of the beautiful lands and they are part of us.”

In sum, data in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 show that most of the reasons for opposition to the power line have land as their basis. Threat to recreational uses, negative environmental impacts and threat to aesthetics are the top three most mentioned reasons for opposition concerning land. In addition, the negative environmental impacts of the power line and threat to aesthetics are the two most often mentioned reasons for opposition that are based on land but that are not bases of place identity. Threat to recreational uses and cultural attachment are the two most frequently mentioned reasons that are both bases of place identity and based on land.

However, these data alone do not illuminate the main reasons for letter writers' opposition to the power line. An analysis of the primary reasons for opposition in the letters is needed. Most of the letters that mentioned land gave one or more primary reason for opposition to the AEP power line. The primary reason(s) for opposition in each letter was defined as the reason(s) for opposition a writer wrote the most about or explicitly labeled as his or her primary reason for opposition. Letters coded as having more than one primary reason gave similar amounts of attention to addressing each primary reason. This differs from the above analysis, by singling out the primary reason or reasons for opposition mentioned by the letter writer who possibly mentioned many reasons for their opposition. Due to the emphasis on collective identities based on place identity, specifically including land, in this thesis, the analysis of main themes was restricted to

primary reasons both based on land and bases of place identity or combinations of primary reasons that included a reason(s) both based on land and bases of place identity.

As shown in Table 4.3, threat to recreational uses (60%), that is, outdoor activities mainly pertaining to hiking, is the primary reason for opposition mentioned by 81 of 135 letter writers who mentioned a main reason(s) that is both based on land and a basis of place identity. Cultural attachment (9.6%) was mentioned by 13 of the 135 letter writers. Letters with unique combinations of four or more main reasons for opposition (8.9%) were mentioned by 12 letter writers, and letters with unique combinations of less than four main reasons for opposition (4.4%) were mentioned by 6 letter writers. Finally, were combinations of reasons, such as the equal mention of threat to aesthetics and threat to recreational uses (3.7%) mentioned by 5 writers, historical significance, roots, and defines.

**Table 4.3. Primary Reasons for Opposition - Based on Land and Bases of Place Identity**

<i>Main Reasons for Opposition</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Threat to Recreational Uses	60.0%
Cultural Attachment	9.6%
4 or more primary reasons	8.9
Less than 4 primary reasons	4.4
Threat to Aesthetics/ Recreational Uses	3.7
Threat to Recreational Uses/ Negative Environmental Impacts	3.7
Threat to Aesthetics/ Recreational Uses/ Negative Environmental Impacts	3.7
Historical Significance	2.2
Roots	1.5
Threat to Aesthetics/ Cultural Attachment	1.5
Defines Oneself	.7
Total	<u>100%</u>
	N = 135

In sum, data in tables 4.2 and 4.3 show threat to recreational uses and cultural attachment to be the two most frequent reasons for opposition, both based on land and as bases of place identity, that are mentioned most frequently by the letter writers and that are the most prevalent primary reasons for opposition. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 similarly show historical significance, familial roots and defines oneself as the least most mentioned reasons for opposition and the least prevalent primary reasons for opposition based on land and as bases of place identity. Overall, the analysis of reasons mentioned for opposition and primary reasons mentioned for opposition yielded similar results.

#### The Collective Identities of the Letter Writers

In contrast to the previously - mentioned individual reasons for opposition, some letter writers exhibited group identification in their opposition. By looking at the dimensions of collective identity, that is, boundaries, consciousness, and negotiations, emphasized in the literature on social movement organizations, more information can be obtained regarding the collective identities of those letter writers who exhibited group identification in their letters. Boundaries, consciousness and negotiations are analytically distinct but often occur together. For this reason, in the analysis to follow, characteristics of boundaries, consciousness and negotiations can be found together in some of the examples given.

### *Boundaries*

Overall, the mention of indicators of boundaries, consciousness and negotiations by the letter writers was minimal. Of the 300 writers whose letters were analyzed, only 8.3% mentioned either shared social or geographical similarities that distinguished them from supporters of the power line, that is, showed signs of boundary-making. Writers identified a "we" on the basis of either social or geographical differences from "them", their opponents. One writer from Bland, Virginia, wrote, "we as local community groups are prepared to mobilize on behalf of the Forest Service's no action alternative". Another writer from Giles County, Virginia commented "we (the residents of Giles County) appreciate your efforts 'to keep it like it is'." Two writers, both members of Citizens Against High Voltage Power Lines, stated "we are working hard to protect southern West Virginia against unnecessary dangers." Another writer commented on how the residents of Monroe County, West Virginia should be applauded for their efforts against the proposed power line, while a writer from Monroe County stated " Monroe County people are serious about keeping the line out of Monroe County." Finally, two writers refer to the Appalachian Trail, "we (The Appalachian Long Distance Hikers Association) love the beautiful resources of the trail" and the other writing "we the trail community support the draft EIS (Environmental Impact Statement)."

### *Consciousness*

Indicators of group consciousness were found in 11.7% of the 300 letters analyzed. Group consciousness was identified by the mention of common interests among those in opposition, the mention of documents or speeches given pertaining to

those common interests, or the mention of a story of involvement in opposition. Of the thirty-five writers who gave evidence of group consciousness, 97% mentioned common interests among those in opposition to the power line, but only one writer referred to any documents or speeches given by those in opposition, and no writers spoke of a story of involvement in opposition. The one writer who mentioned any documents or speeches given by those in opposition wrote of including a copy of a report by the Citizens Organized to Protect the Environment and Citizens to Protect Craig County. Examples of the members' common interests are given in the paragraphs to follow.

Common interests among the letter writers were the most prevalent indicators of group consciousness. Common interests among participants can be seen in the preceding examples of boundary making. For example, "we (the residents of Giles County) appreciate your efforts to keep it like it is". Citizens against High Voltage Power Lines favor "working hard to protect south West Virginia against unnecessary dangers." Finally, in reference to the Monroe County residents, they are serious about keeping the line out of Monroe County.

Other indicators of group consciousness are seen in several of the letters written by the Preston Forest homeowners and specifically in the letter from their homeowners' association. As a group they (1) "wholeheartedly support" the conclusions of the EIS, (2) feel the power line would "unacceptably harm the common ecosystem shared by the Forest and private properties," (3) are concerned about herbicides and other contaminants in the drinking water as well as high voltage lines near their children, and (4) feel that the EIS understates the number of possible home dislocations and homes affected by operational noise.

Indications of group consciousness were found in the many letters written by hikers of the Appalachian Trail. One writer wrote, "there are many hikers who are pleased by your decision (the Forest Service's no action alternative) and stand behind you 100%". Another writer wrote, "your action (suggestion of the "no-action" alternative) is appreciated by me and many hikers I know"; while another wrote, "consider my voice as the voice of every hiker that hikes the Appalachian Trail and don't put a power line through our forest".

Finally, various letters from other writers contained indications of group consciousness. One writer wrote, "there are many people supporting you (the Forest Service and their "no-action" alternative)"; while another wrote, "your action is supported by many people". A third writer noted that he has spoken with many neighbors who oppose AEP's project. Another writer pointed out that they "joined with their neighbors' unity of purpose in opposing the AEP 765 power line." A fifth writer commented that the Forest Service had received over 6,000 [sic] letters from citizens who "don't want our National Forest desecrated with an unsightly power line." Finally, a writer wrote "it is our firm belief (and the belief of many others) that this line is simply not needed!"

### *Negotiations*

Indicators of negotiations, indicated by the mention of group meetings regarding opposition, activities done in opposition and symbols of opposition, among those in opposition to the power line were mentioned by only 14 of the 300 writers. Approximately a third of those writers mentioned meetings by those opposed to the power line in their letters. One writer wrote of a multi-club meeting among the southern

region hiking clubs in which they learned of AEP's proposal to cross the Appalachian Trail. Another writer wrote of the Appalachian Trail Conference and how they supported the conference's decision concerning the power line. A third writer wrote of attending Border Conservation meetings for a year. The Border Conservation consists of members from Monroe County, West Virginia, and Craig County, Virginia, who helped in the assessment of the area's cultural attachment for the purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement. A last writer acknowledged that Monroe County residents had numerous voluntary meetings regarding their opposition to the power line.

Protest activities, as often indicted by the words "fight" and "quest" suggesting activities done in protest, were mentioned by half of the fourteen writers who indicated group negotiations. One person wrote of his continuous support of COPE (Citizens Organized to Protect the Environment) and its fight against the proposed power line. A second writer wrote of James W. McNeely and his help in mobilizing local communities to fight the AEP power line. Another writer thanked the Forest Service for taking the time to listen to those citizens involved in fighting against AEP. A fourth writer requested the Forest Service to help the citizens in their quest to prevent the terrible destruction that would be caused by the AEP power line. A last writer acknowledged the "protest activities" of those with commercial riverboat interests who are concerned about reduced aesthetics due to the power line.

Finally, a third of the fourteen writers who indicated group negotiations mentioned symbols. Three of the four writers included an anti-power line symbol, as seen in figure 4.1, on their letter. The last writer wrote of the numerous signs opposing the power line that he had seen posted by farmers, land owners, and lifelong residents.

**Figure 4.1. Anti-Power Line Symbol**



Data regarding the indicators of collective identity suggest the presence of various collective identities among the letter writers. To start, the indicators of boundaries suggest several possible collective identities, of which are the residents of Giles and Monroe Counties, Citizens Against High Voltage Power Lines, Appalachian Trail hikers, and local community groups in general. The indicators of consciousness further suggest these collective identities by pointing out the common interests among each of them, as discussed earlier. Additionally, the indicators of consciousness point out the collective identity, residents of Preston Forest, and further stress the collective identity, Appalachian Trail hikers, by pointing out their common interests. The indicators of consciousness also strongly suggest a universal collective identity, people against the power line. Finally, indicators of group negotiations suggest two other collective identities, Border Conservationists and COPE (Citizens Organized to Protect the Environment). Additionally, indicators of group negotiations further acknowledge the collective identities, residents of Monroe County and Appalachian Trail hikers. Once again, a universal collective identity, people against the power line, is suggested by

indicators of negotiations pointing out the mention of the use of anti-power line signs by various people.

*Other Important Possible Indices of Collective Identity*

In addition to the indications of boundaries, consciousness and negotiations mentioned above, 38 letter writers mentioned an affiliation with one or more various local and national groups, such as the Sierra Club. However, these letter writers made no indications of group boundaries, consciousness or negotiations, that is, a collective identity, in their letters. For example, one letter writer writes in their first sentence that he/she is affiliated with Piedmont Appalachian Trail Hikers and that that he/she is a member of the Appalachian Trail Conference. However, the rest of the letter expresses personal support of the U.S. Forest Services “no-action” alternative and concern for the damage the power line would do to the Appalachian Trail. In sum, the mention of group affiliation did not necessarily indicate the existence of a collective identity, that is, mention group boundaries, consciousness and/or negotiations.

As mentioned in the methods section, form letters were omitted from the content analysis. Among the 1651 letters written to the Forest Service, five separate form letters were sent by various writers. The most prevalent form letter was sent by approximately 493 respondents, 30% of the total letters, from Monroe County. Concerns mentioned were the crossing of the New River by the power line, the cultural attachment of Monroe County residents to their land, and the effect of the power line on their Scenic By-ways and Backways. Acceptance of the Forest Service's "no-action" alternative was also mentioned. A second form letter, sent by residents in southwest Virginia, commended

the Forest Service for their "no-action" alternative and urged that not even a small part of public lands be sacrificed to AEP for the construction of their 765 Kv power line. A third form letter, also sent by residents of southwest Virginia, mentioned support of the "no-action" alternative, in addition to support of the Forest Service's decision to identify the crossing of private land by the power line as equally harmful to the environment. A fourth form letter, sent by residents of southern West Virginia, mentioned the support of the "no-action" alternative and concern over the power line crossing the New River and Bluestone lake. The last form letter, sent in by residents of Mercer County, West Virginia, mentioned agreement with the Forest Service's "no-action" alternative.

The form letter from the residents of Monroe County reiterates the collective identity, residents of Monroe County. The other form letters introduce the possibility of three more collective identities: residents of southwest Virginia who oppose the power line, residents of southern West Virginia who oppose the power line and residents of Mercer County who oppose the power line. The latter three collective identities are hard to further define due to the lack of information given in each form letter. However, the act of sending a form letter indicates the presence of a collective identity among those people sending the letter due to common interests mentioned in the form letter, as well as, the act itself being a type of protest activity.

#### Collective Identities of the Letter Writers Based on Place Identity

The analysis of reasons for opposition by letter writers who did not exemplify group identification has shown reasons for opposition that are both based on land and bases of place identity. In addition, the indicators of collective identity, that is

boundaries, consciousness and negotiations, along with the various form letters received from writers, have shown the presence of collective identities among the letter writers. Given these data, it is pertinent and the goal of my thesis to identify what role place identity, specifically involving land, has in constructing some of the collective identities present among the letter writers who wrote in opposition to the power line.

Appalachian Trail hikers were the most prevalent collective identity that emerged among the letters. The indicators of collective identity, that is, boundaries, consciousness, and negotiations, indicated the presence of the collective identity, Appalachian Trail hikers. For example, some hikers of the Appalachian Trail identified themselves as a distinct “we” who shared a common interest, to keep the power line out of the national forest and away from the trail. Finally, indications of group negotiations could be seen by the hikers' various club meetings and by their writing to the Forest Service. In sum, Appalachian Trail hikers was the most prevalent collective identity among the letters and threat to recreational uses was a basis of their identity.

The collective identity, Appalachian Trail hikers, was based on the threat to recreational uses, that is, hiking the Appalachian Trail. As literature on place identity has shown, recreational settings, such as the Appalachian Trail, are bases of identity. One writer writes, “The proposed routing of the power line would hurt the experience of the hikers on the Appalachian Trail.” It is the experience of hiking the Appalachian Trail frequently that many residents and non-residents of Appalachia identify with. Overall, threat to recreational uses proved to be a basis of identity for those who did not exemplify group identification and for those who did exemplify group identification in their letters, that is, the Appalachian Trail hikers.

Residents of Monroe County, West Virginia was another collective identity that emerged in the sample of 300 letters. As found in doing the content analysis, the residents of Monroe County are an acknowledged “we” that are “serious about keeping the line out of Monroe County.” One writer from Monroe County writes, “ I urge you (the Forest Service) to continue to take your courageous stand against construction of this power line that is neither needed or wanted by citizens of Monroe County, WV.” Another writer from Monroe County states, “These are the sentiments of Monroe Countians. Even those that have had to seek employment elsewhere have rallied to keep our land and way of life in tact.” It was also made known through content analysis that the residents of Monroe County had numerous voluntary meetings, a sign of group negotiations regarding their opposition. A second sign of group negotiations was the 493 form letters sent to the Forest Service by the Monroe County residents and the twenty-seven other individual letters written and sent into the Forest Service by residents of Monroe County.

The collective identity, residents of Monroe County, is based on two bases of place identity that, according to the literature, are distinct characteristics of Appalachia. As the form letter from Monroe County residents mentioned, cultural attachment was one the main reason for the residents’ of Monroe County's opposition to the power line. As stated in the literature, places and land are bases of identity for many Appalachian people because they provide familial roots as well as are historically significant. As Foster (1988:157) demonstrates, the past for many people in Appalachia is a conglomeration of experiences by which their social and cultural identities are based. The collective identity, Monroe County residents, is based upon place identity and land in that places

and land are bases of history for many people in Appalachia and thus a significant part of the Appalachian culture.

The crossing of the New River by the AEP power line was another reason mentioned for Monroe County residents' opposition to the power line. The New River is a landmark that has been a part of Monroe County since its existence, therefore, a part of its history. As mentioned above, places for many people in Appalachia, provide familial roots and are historically significant; thus contributing to the social and cultural identities of many Appalachian people and Appalachia. In sum, the collective identity, Monroe County residents, was based on cultural attachment and historical significance, both characteristic of Appalachia, as Appalachian literature has indicated, and both bases of place identity.

Two other collective identities were residents of Giles County and Border Conservationists members. The residents of Giles County want to “keep it like it is” and Border Conservationists, consisting of members from Monroe County, West Virginia and Craig County, Virginia, are concerned about the assessment of cultural attachment to their area. These were the only two references made to both groups within the sample. Both of these references are vague; therefore, making it hard to pinpoint a collective identity for either group other than residents of Giles County and Border Conservationist members.

The collective identities, residents of Giles County and Border Conservationists, are both based on place identity and land. The residents of Giles County want to keep it as it is. As literature on Appalachian resistance has shown, resistance in Appalachia has "most frequently occurred in struggles to preserve traditional values and ways of life

against the forces of modernization" (Fisher 1993:4). As literature on Appalachia has also shown, many of the traditional values and ways of life in Appalachia, that is, Appalachian culture, are based on both places and the land. Therefore, it can be determined that the collective identity, residents of Giles County, is both based on place identity and land and is characteristic of Appalachia as Appalachian literature has indicated.

The members of the Border Conservation are concerned about the cultural attachment to their area. As mentioned previously, both places and the land are important culturally for many Appalachian people due to their historical significance and importance as a means for defining oneself and familial roots. Therefore, it can be determined that the collective identity, Border Conservationists, is both based on place identity and land and characteristic of Appalachia.

Overall, many of the collective identities identified through the content analysis were based on place identity, specifically on land. In addition, those collective identities that were based on land, specifically those of the Appalachian Trail hikers and the residents of Monroe County, were the most prevalent collective identities indicated by the content analysis. In sum, the collective identities based on place identity, specifically on land, were more common than the other collective identities identified and more prevalent.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As literature on social movement organizations indicates, it is through mobilization that individual identities become collective. The literature on place identity defines place as a component of identity along with sex, social class, ethnic background, occupation, religion and so on (Prochansky 1983:59). As Cuba and Humman (1993:112) explain, places construct, maintain and transform identity because they are bound spaces that are painted with personal, social, and cultural meanings. Literature on Appalachia has shown that land is a basis of place identity in that it constructs many Appalachian people's identity by defining them, by providing them with familial roots, by being historically and culturally significant, and by being recreationally important for both residents and non-residents who recreate often on land in Appalachia. It is due to the significance of land in constructing many Appalachian people's individual identities, that the role of land in constructing the collective identities of people in a sub-region of Appalachia who mobilized against the construction of the AEP power was significant to address.

My content analysis of letters written to the U.S. Forest Service by those individuals who opposed the AEP power line helped identify the reasons for opposition to the power line and the collective identities of the letter writers. The content analysis showed land to be the reason for opposition most mentioned by letter writers not including health concerns, the lack of need for the power line, and various other reasons mentioned. Of reasons for letter writers' opposition based on land, the top three most mentioned reasons by letter writers were threat to recreational uses, the negative environmental impacts and threat to aesthetics. However, threat to recreational uses,

cultural attachment and historical significance were the top three reasons for opposition most mentioned that were both based on land and bases of place identity. Analysis of the primary reasons for opposition, determined by the reason mentioned most or said to be the main reason by each writer, indicated similar findings to the analysis of reasons most mentioned by letter writers. In sum, land played a significant role in the reasons for opposition to the power line, specifically for those who did not exemplify group identification in their opposition.

For those who did exemplify group identification in their opposition, it was by looking at the indicators of collective identity, that is, boundaries, consciousness and negotiations, that the collective identities of the letter writers could be understood, specifically their basis on place-identity, including land, and identified. Overall, the indicators of collective identity suggested the presence of various collective identities among the letter writers, some of whom were residents of Giles County or Citizens Against High Voltage Power Lines, as indicated by signs of boundary making. Other collective identities were the residents of Preston Forest and Appalachian Trail hikers, as indicated by the mention of common interests (an indicator of group consciousness) and the citizens of Monroe County and COPE (Citizens Organized to Protect the Environment), as indicated by the mention of group meetings and/or protest activities (both signs of group negotiations). Residents of Monroe and Giles Counties, Appalachian Trail hikers and Border Conservationists were the only collective identities that were based on place identity, specifically including land, that is, defines oneself, provides familial roots, historically significant, cultural attachment and threat to recreational uses.

Out of those groups whose collective identities were based on place identity, specifically on land, the Appalachian Trail hikers proved to be one of the most obvious. As indicated through the indicators of collective identity, i.e., boundaries, consciousness and negotiations, the collective identity, Appalachian Trail hikers, was based on the experience of frequently hiking the Appalachian trail and the desire to keep the power line from crossing the Appalachian Trail. The collective identity, Monroe County residents, also indicated by boundaries, consciousness and negotiations, was primarily based on their cultural attachment to the land, as well as on the historically significant New River and on the desire to keep the line out of their county. Less obvious collective identities based on place identity, specifically including land, were the collective identities, Giles County residents, based on keeping it as it is, and Border Conservationists, based on cultural attachment.

Overall, the indicators of collective identity, i.e., boundaries, consciousness, and negotiations, suggest a more universal collective identity, that is, people who share opposition to the AEP power line. Statements such as, “We as local community groups are prepared to mobilize on behalf of the Forest Service’s ‘no-action’ alternative,” There are many people supporting you (the Forest Service and their "no-action" alternative), “Your action is supported by many people”, and “It is our firm belief (and the belief of many others) that this line is simply not needed”, suggest a universal identity, regardless of individual reasons for opposition and based upon overall opposition to the power line and acceptance of the Forest Service’ "no-action" alternative. These suggestions are reiterated by one letter writer’s mention of the numerous signs of opposition seen posted on various people's property and by the 1651 letters written to the U.S. Forest Service.

The literature on social movement organizations, specifically Appalachian literature focusing on symbolic capital, brought a better understanding to the mobilization of those who opposed the AEP power line. Social movement literature stressed rationality and the importance of resources for mobilization along with introducing the presence and importance of collective identities among social movement organizations. Additionally, social movement literature emphasized the necessity of boundaries, consciousness and negotiations to understand collective identity. In sum, the literature on social movements provided the tools to analyze and better understand the opposition and mobilization of those opposing the AEP line, as well as stress the importance of understanding their collective identities via boundaries, consciousness and negotiations.

This thesis contributes to the literature in several ways. To begin, it supports both the literature on place identity and the literature on the importance of land in Appalachia by showing that place, specifically involving land, can be a basis of individual or collective identity, as seen by the letter writers who did not exemplify group identification in their opposition and by those who did exemplify group identification in their opposition to the power line. In addition, this thesis adds to the literature of social movement organizations by linking the concept of place identity to collective identity.

The findings of this thesis are more suggestive than conclusive. A content analysis allowed for the identification of various collective identities, specifically those based on place identity, that is, those of the Appalachian Trail Hikers, the residents of Monroe and Giles County and the Border Conservationists, but did not allow for a more in-depth analysis of their basis on place and land. As suggested by the literature, land is symbolic capital and an important basis of Appalachian people's identities. The

collective identities found do not strongly reflect this, as the most prevalent collective identity was Appalachian Trail hikers many of whom are non-residents of Appalachia. This particular finding does show the importance of the land in Appalachia for non-residents who recreate there often. However, the collective identities, residents of Monroe and Giles Counties and Border Conservationists, do reflect the importance of both place and land as symbolic capital and as a basis of identity for Appalachia people with their bases of cultural attachment and keeping the land as it is. Overall, the findings suggest that many of the groups in opposition to the AEP power line do have collective identities based on place identity, specifically including land. With further analysis, either through interviews or attendance of anti-power line group meetings, a greater understanding of those collective identities can be understood, specifically their basis on place and land.

In sum, this thesis theoretically adds to literature on place identity, social movement organizations and the importance of land both culturally and symbolically in Appalachia. As mentioned earlier, for Appalachian people land is not seen as a commodity to be traded and exploited, but is seen as something sacred and as part of their being (Young 1998:79). To understand land as a basis of identity, as shown by the analysis of the letters written in opposition to the power line, is to understand land as many Appalachian people do. This understanding of land clarifies the opposition of many people, both native and non-native of Appalachia, to the trading and exploitation of the land. Finally, through this thesis I hope to contribute depth in understanding the sentiments of many Appalachian people toward their land in the hope of preventing the land's destruction.

## APPENDEIX A

### CODING SHEET

Letter #: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address of letter: \_\_\_\_\_

group affiliation: \_\_\_\_ (1= mention, 0 = no mention)

# of people the letter is representing: \_\_\_\_

native of area mentioned in letter \_\_\_\_ non-native \_\_\_\_ no mention  
(2 = yes, 1 = no, 0 = mention)

#### Summary Codes

##### **A. The reasons for opposition to AEP's power line include:**

(1 = mention, 0 = no mention)

\_\_ 1: concerns about health

\_\_ 2: its not needed

\_\_ 3: the land (as outlined by section B)

\_\_ 4: other: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **B. Reasons concerning opposition to the power line in regards to the land:**

(1 = mention, 0 = no mention)

\_\_ 1: threat to aesthetics

\_\_ 2: threats to recreational uses

\_\_ 3: cultural attachment

\_\_ 4: defines them/part of them

\_\_ 5: provides them with roots

\_\_ 6: historically significant to the community

\_\_ 7: decrease in property value of the land

8: negative environmental impacts

9: other: \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Detail:** (1 = yes, 0 = no)

yes

no

**D. Presence of Collective Identity:**

(1 = mention, 0 = no mention)

*Boundaries:*

1: share social similarities (values, norms, attitudes etc.) that distinguish group from opposition

2: shared geographical difference from opposition

*Consciousness:*

1: story of how became involved in opposition

2: members' common interests

3: documents or speeches

*Negotiations:*

1: meetings among writer and others

2: participated in protest activities

3: symbols that represent opposition to power line

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